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A PRODIGAL'S PROGRESS.

BY

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“LIEUTENANT BARNABAS,” “FOLLY MORRISON,” ETC.

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A PRODIGAL'S PROGRESS.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRODIGAL.

“TRY this pigeon pie, my young friend ; I never tasted a better in all my life,” said the Reverend Joseph Tickel, tilting the dish to get the last spoonful of gravy. “The beef is excellent, but this *is*——” Words failing to express adequately the merits of the pie, he concluded the sentence with a smack of his full lips ; then delicately taking up a piece of crust with the fingers of one hand, he pushed the dish with the other across the table to Blase Godwin.

Blase took no notice of the suggestion. He sat with his chair turned from the table, his legs crossed, his fingers knitted over his knee, and his eyes fixed upon the fire in moody meditation. His plate was unsoiled ; the ale which his companion had poured out for him was untouched.

The rattle of the parson's knife and fork, accompanying his frequent remarks upon the excellence of the food he ate, continued without interruption for some minutes ; then Blase raised his head with a deep-drawn breath and said :

“ It shall finish.” (Mr. Tickel made no comment, but collected the last morsels on his fork and transferred them to his capacious mouth.) “ I will reform.”

“ Again, my boy ? ” said the Reverend Joseph, with his mouth full, and scraping his plate. “ Why, it can't be but a fortnight from the last reformation.”

“ I will not touch the dice again.”

“A good resolution! A capital resolution! When a man has such damnable ill luck with the bones as you have, he would be a fool to persevere with 'em. Try something else.”

“I intend to try something else. I will try sober living, decent pleasures, and, Mr. Tickel, reputable companions.”

Blase looked across the table significantly as he spoke; but the stout divine met his glance without wincing, though he knew full well for whom the thrust was intended.

“I wish to Heaven you would stick to that last article, Blase,” said he. “I sometimes blush to be seen in the company of such fellows as you herd with. I risk my reputation every time I go out with you; upon my soul I do.”

“Go into the next room and fetch my pocket-book from the coat I threw off when we came in.”

Mr. Tickel rose, wiping his mouth, and fetched the book. Blase opened it, saying :

“ Sit down, parson. You will find that I am more serious than you think. How much money had I last evening ? ”

“ A couple of hundred in your pocket, and a thousand in the funds, roughly told.”

“ And how much do I owe ? ”

“ Four or five hundred, not more ; all to respectable tradesmen, and as not a debt is older than Michaelmas Day, and there's a clear two months to Christmas, you haven't a dun to fear.

“ How much do you owe ? ”

“ Not a groat, my young friend — not a mag.” Mr. Tickel pulled out his snuff-box and drew himself up with an air of conscious rectitude.

“ That is to say, your debts are included in the four or five hundred set to my account,” said Blase, ciphering in his pocket-book. Mr. Tickel was too occupied

with his pinch of snuff to take any notice of this imputation.

“Tradesmen—five hundred,” continued Blase; “notes of hand to my Lord Atherly, Mr. Saloman, and others—seven, six, nought. Seven sixty and five hundred are twelve sixty. That puts me sixty pounds in debt when all is paid.”

“Atherly must be paid; he’s a peer, and only holds paper for a hundred or so. But as for that Saloman, who has the major part of your acknowledgments, why, I would discharge my obligation to such a Jew scoundrel as that as a Christian gentleman should.”

“How?”

“Why, you know the fellow’s a cheat, Blase.”

“Well!”

“Tell him so to his face before his friends, and give him a tweak of the nose, if that’s all.”

“What follows?”

“There’s not one of his friends but owes him something, and would be glad to have him out of the way. They’ll force him to send you a message.”

“Go on.”

“Why, the fellow has no more courage than a partridge, and he’d sooner send you back your notes of hand, and a handsome apology, than meet you. But if he dares to measure swords with you, you may profit by the *botte* you learned of the little French master.”

“Good God!” cried Blase, springing to his feet, “have I sunk to such a level of contempt that you dare to offer me such villainous advice?”

“Respect my cloth, sir; respect my cloth! Villainous advice! Is that the term you apply to the counsel of a minister of religion? Are rogues, my young friend, to go unpunished? Are we to

wink at villainy, and encourage fraud? Is it not written, 'The wages of sin is death'?"

"We need but a text to rob on the highway respectably," said Blase, with a harsh laugh; then stopping before Tickel—he had been pacing the room to and fro—he said, in a tone of mingled remorse and reproach, "Parson, I do believe you have done more to bring me to destruction than my own hot blood and lawless inclinations. For eight years you have been my constant companion, and in all that time have you never once exerted the authority which position and age gave you to turn me from evil ways. You have removed the obstacles from my downward path; not once have you supported me in my feeble struggles to do right. You have flattered and fooled me to the top of my bent. You have put a gloss upon my sins, and dulled the fine edge

of conscience. You have made duty a bye-word, and shown me no higher object in life than the gratification of my impetuous desires. Eight years ago I was a decent, healthy lad, and now I am—what I am!”

“This is generosity with a witness to it!” cried the Reverend Joseph Tickel. “What! to turn round upon your faithful follower when you get into a slough, and cry, ‘This is thy fault!’ Is that manly? I am not your keeper, my young friend. I ceased to be your governor five years ago, when you came of age, and since then I have followed you through thick and thin, from sheer love and pity, and served you as no other man could. You do not say how I have suffered by my foolish attachment, or what degradation I might have escaped by a little consideration on your part. You take no notice of the services I have rendered. It is nothing that I bit the

bad shilling the hackney coachman would have passed off on you o' Friday. No, you only blame me for not tripping you up in your mad course, and getting myself kicked out of your friendship for my pains."

Blase had dropped into a chair, and, deep in his own reflection, seemed heedless of the parson's protest.

"I might have been a better man," he said.

"And *I* might have been a bishop!" the parson exclaimed with a sigh.

"Where is Granger?"

"Below, waiting to know at what hour you will ride."

"Let him take the horses to Tattersall, with a letter bidding him sell them."

Mr. Tickel shook his head disapprovingly.

"And you, parson, go to the agent and get me eight hundred."

The parson took a deliberate pinch of snuff, and having carefully shaken his frill,

said, "This reformation will cost you a lot of money, Blase. You won't get above half that you paid for that pair of horses, and when in about a fortnight you want a couple more——"

"I shall not want them in a fortnight."

"Then my name will not be Joseph Tickel, and you may tell me I know nothing of human nature. Come, Blase, pluck up courage and have done with these sickly fancies. Take a blue pill and I warrant this megrim will pass, and you will see life in warmer tints. Remember, lad, how you were cast down by the faithlessness of Mrs. Kitely, and vowed in this very room you would be duped never again by a woman; and remember how, a week later, you were wooing the pretty wench from the King's Theatre with all the ardour of first love."

"Yes, I remember that, and a dozen other follies; and I will try to bear 'em in

mind, parson, to keep me from the like again. I am in earnest for the first time—from no praiseworthy motive, but because necessity compels me to a different mode of living.”

He rose again from his chair, took a turn or two up and down the room, as if to bring himself to a painful task, and then stopping before Tickel, he pulled out his purse and said :

“That’s pretty much as it was last evening, parson. Take it, and find some better task than that of waiting upon a ruined spendthrift.”

The parson looked at the purse and then at Blase, in silent astonishment for a minute; then, speaking in a lowered voice, and with the tears in his little blue eyes, he said :

“You don’t mean that we’re to part, Blase?”

Blase nodded; he could do no more.

Looking at the parson's great fat face, which had dropped into an expression of the most mournful dejection, the memories of pleasant days and jolly nights filled his mind, and left no space for reproach. He had laughed at the parson's faults ever since he first saw through his shallow virtues, and liked him for them. He could not harden his heart against him, or bring himself to break their old companionship with even a show of indifference.

The parson saw the tenderness in his friend's face, and his own opportunity. "I'm a leaky vessel, Blase," said he, "and I have enough vices to answer for, God knows, without that of ingratitude. I have helped you to spend your money, and I'll help you to bear poverty if it needs be. I won't leave you, that's certain. Take back your purse, lad; the first bottle I bought with it would choke me. What! I am none of your fair-weather friends!

I'm not a rat, to sneak out of the sinking ship. Nay, come to that, you may find me as good a hand as any to help keep her afloat: and not mutinous neither. Come, tell me your will, and test my trustiness. Sit you down—nearer to me—there, so. Now, you are fixed on carrying out this notion of reform?”

“I am; by George, I am!”

“Then I'll help you, though every principle of my nature should rise against it. Granger shall have the note, and take the nags, and I'll to the agent and bid him sell out eight hundred of stocks to pay that thief Saloman—and may Heaven forgive us. For the other bills, we may leave them until payment is demanded, without lapsing into profligacy; and then, my young friend, we have a matter of five or six hundred or thereabouts to begin our new life with. You're resolved against the dice?”

“I will not touch them again.”

“What then? Shall you try the lotteries?”

“No. I shall not hazard the little I have left.”

“Then, begad, Blase, living at the rate of fifteen guineas a week, we’re not likely to clear off our tradesfolks’ accounts by Christmas.”

“We must give up this establishment, and live cheaper.”

“With all my heart. Nothing suits me better than a snug chamber in a tavern. Hang these fine rooms, where a man can’t stretch without flinging over a hundred pounds’ worth of china pagods; and a pretty penny you’ll have to pay for break-ages, my young friend, when you give up this house! Here is expense without comfort. I sit me down as gingerly as a goose on her eggs for fear I may burst the chair; there’s not a room where I dare smoke an honest clay pipe; and the lazy

vagabonds we call our servants are our masters—they'll do nothing without their vails : it costs me a crown or a rap on my bunion every time I want my shoe tied. Give me a snug chamber in a tavern, my corner by the coffee-room fire, with a rummer shelf o' one side and a spittoon o' t'other, a smiling hostess, and no servant but a neat, clean, pretty little black-eyed rogue of a chambermaid—ah !”

The parson's face expanded in a genial smile as his imagination dwelt on this picture ; but presently, seeing that Blase did not share his enthusiasm, and sat looking again upon the fire with brows bent, his thoughts took another turn, and a look of perplexity came over his face. Scratching his ear, he said :

“The devil of it is that even a modest life of that kind costs money, and at present it looks as if we shall have to begin modest living on nothing at all.”

"Nothing. Fifteen thousand pounds all spent, and in eight years! Have I been mad?"

"Not very, Blase. A little frisky at times. Something too easy with the rascals, something too generous with your friends—that's how the money has slipped through your fingers."

"Would I could live those years again!" Blase said, with an accent of remorse.

"And so do I," responded the parson devoutly.

"I might have learnt a profession, or risen to some laudable eminence amongst men, earning my father's love instead of his aversion. Oh, if I could look back but on one single act and say, 'That was well done!' There's not a memory but that I would blot out. Decent people shun me. The few that really loved me I dare not face for shame; I can only hope that they have forgotten me, and ceased to grieve."

The ready tears sprang to the parson's eyes, for he could weep like a woman when it was expedient. He put his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder and said :

“Take heart, my boy. If there is no act you can recall with pride, 'tis because your left hand has not known that which the right hand did. Only the mean treasure up in their memories the sacrifices they have made to virtue ; the generous make them unknowingly. Has ever an appeal for charity been set aside, or carelessly forgot ? Have ever you failed to support the honour of an absent friend ? Have ever you shirked to do a kindly action because it was in itself irksome ? In fine, have you not sustained the character for truth and honour of a gentleman of England ? *That* for remorse !” The parson snapped his fingers. “I say you have lived well, and spent your money royally ; and the only regret I have in thinking of the

money that's gone is, that we haven't it now to spend over again in the same manner."

Blase laughed, despite his cares.

"Oh, confound your careful young gentry, I say," exclaimed the parson. "I'd birch every lad that saved his pocket-money ; and every young fellow of five and twenty who could not acknowledge to some act of folly, I'd make to wear a badge, that his fellow-men might have caution in their dealings with him."

"Then you take it I am ruined by being over virtuous ?"

"Why, Blase, I cannot but admit that you've overstepped the limits of prudence. But let those who have resisted temptation call you hard names ; I can't."

The parson's eye chancing to fall upon the ale-jug, he filled his glass and emptied it.

"Who says the offences of youth are unpardonable ?" continued the parson.

“None but the dyspeptics—sour within and without—whose only temptation has been to avoid the cup and the petticoat. Give one of the bilious, ugly rascals a stomach like mine, that feels the better for eating and drinking, and a bold handsome face like yours, Blase, that never a woman can pass without a wishful side-glance, and I warrant his morality will relax.”

“Parson,” said Blase, rousing himself, “if you preached until to-morrow morning, your sophistry would not convince me that I have not reason to be ashamed of my past life. However, let the past pass; ’tis the future that concerns us now, and how we are to do that which should be done.”

“To be sure, Blase. There’s a text for a pretty homily!”

“We’ve no time for it now. Let us think how I am to earn an honourable living.”

“’Tis a puzzling question—how to make

money without capital, my young friend. Commerce is closed against you. The son and heir of a baronet could hardly be expected to measure silks in a mercer's; though I wager all the ladies would flock to your counter. What do you think of Art? You're counted an admirable critic."

"A strong argument against my being a respectable painter. No; I have no special ability."

"Well, what do you think of Literature? There's a profession that requires no money, and as far as one may judge by what one reads now, no special ability either."

"Try again, parson."

"I am at a standstill, for all the other professions require money to begin with."

A long silence ensued, in which both men looked vaguely at the flickering flame of the coal fire; then the Rev. Joseph Tickel, turning in his seat, and bringing his big fist down upon the table with a

thump that set the plates and knives rattling, cried, "I know what must be done, Blase; that is, if this idea of repentance will hold out long enough."

"I promise you it will."

"Then we will go down into Dorsetshire to your father, and make the old gentleman kill the fatted calf."

"I haven't been near him for eight years."

"Why, you haven't wanted to go near him!"

"He refused point-blank to let me have any more money when last I wrote."

"That was reasonable enough, when he knew 'twould be spent in riotous living."

"He said he would give no more."

"You're not bound to believe him—he's your father."

"Father! He cares less for me than if he were my son. Never once has he expressed a wish to see me, or shown the

slightest interest in my welfare. He has not even written to me under his own hand, but always through his chaplain."

"Confound his chaplain for an accursed Jesuit!"

"He is under the influence of that man. He may have become fanatically pious, and then what favour should I get from him?"

"Favour! You don't ask him to do you a kindness; you simply demand that he shall perform his Christian duty. I'll tell him the parable of the prodigal son, and we'll see how he gets over that."

"I don't like the idea."

"Why not? 'Tis easy, and as moral as you could wish. You go there and say you have come to ask forgiveness, and intend never more to desert the paternal roof. And I'd keep my word, too, were I you, unless he made it worth my while to retract."

"'Tis a mean thing to go home and

plead penitence when you have no more money to spend ; and I won't play that part of the prodigal son's career if I can help it."

"But you can't help it, my young friend."

"We shall see. If in a week's time no better alternative can be found, I will throw myself on my father's mercy."

There the conversation ended.

Mr. Tickel, on his way to the City to get the money required by Blase, called in at Wills' and spent a very pleasant hour in gossip there.

"I would not willingly change this mode of life for seclusion in that damp moated house in Dorsetshire," he said to himself, as he left the coffee-house. "And I pray for the best. It may please Providence to change my young friend's luck at play, and then we shall be at liberty to postpone reformation."

But Blase was determined to change his long run of ill luck without trusting to adventitious help. He stoutly resisted the temptations of the tables, and at the end of the week he bade the parson pack his valise, and book two seats on the Exeter coach.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE COCK INN.

THE Exeter coach stopped for two minutes at the cross roads not far from that point where the three counties of Dorset, Devon, and Somerset meet, and then continued its journey, leaving the two London gentlemen by the finger-post.

Overhead a clear sky, underfoot a clean hard road; a bright atmosphere, with a keen wind from the north, that carries the golden leaves fluttering from the boughs, and sweeps them into the tangled, ragged growth of bramble and brake by the roadside; a long vista of richly tinted oak and beech, with a patch of pink cloud at the

end, against which the speeding coach stands out in sharp-cut silhouette—these things were worth a lingering look.

Blase Godwin thought so as he stood there slowly drawing the rings of his purse. “There’s a picture we may not see again for a twelvemonth,” he said.

“And a d——d good job too,” replied the Rev. Joseph Tickel, with energy; “I’ve seen enough of that road and that coach to last me to my dying day without a wish to see them again. Turn about, my young friend, and tell me if you don’t find *that* a more agreeable picture.” He pointed down the Rockford road, where, beyond the curve by the horse-pond, and above the neatly trimmed box hedge, appeared the gables and smoking chimneys of the Cock Inn.

“Do we not value a picture for what it suggests?” continued the divine. “And what, pray, does your coach and your

straight road convey to the mind but the thought of a cramped seat and aching bones, agues and rheums, upsets, highway-men, and—death? But that thick and well-kept thatch bears a promise of shelter and warmth; and the smoke from those chimneys conjures up the vision of a cool, snowy table-cloth spread with substantial fare—an aitchbone of beef, for example, fat and not over-dressed, a brown toby of foaming ale, with a crusty loaf and a blue cheese in the background.”

“Nature made a mistake when she put your eyes in your head,” said Blase, drawing on his glove and still looking at the landscape.

“Plague take the landlord, I say! He must have heard the horn; then why hasn’t he sent a lad down for the luggage? Well, well! poor old Tickel must carry the things, I suppose.”

With these words the reverend gentle-

man took up the two valises, which contained his own and his companion's travelling requisites, and trudged off towards the inn.

They were large, well packed, and heavy, those bags, and the parson was on that side of fifty when a man begins to feel the effects of free living in an absence of muscular vigour and sustaining power. Doubtless he found his burden burdensome ; but he did not complain, for exertion compelled him to economize his breath, and he was sufficiently philosophical to bear unavoidable ills with resignation. A whispered curse when he came to that part of the road which had been lately dressed with large and many-cornered stones, and another when the bags, from merely scraping his calves, took to swinging round and dodging endwise between them—these were all that escaped him.

Blase, although he suffered from none of

those natural disadvantages which handicapped the parson, made no attempt to relieve him of his load, or carry his own share. He would as soon have brushed his boots. He sauntered easily and lightly along, whistling a cheerful air and serenely indifferent to the parson's difficulties. When Tickel stopped to set down his load, straighten his back, and get breath, he still sauntered whistling onward, leaving him to catch up as he might.

Beyond the curve in the road the inn came fairly into sight—a long, irregular building, half-timbered, with tall gables, each surmounted by a shining gold weathercock. Everything bespoke a good inn—clean paint, bright windows, spotless curtains of dimity, a stand of geraniums over the bay front of the long public room, and in the bow window of the bar parlour a goodly show of bottles and glasses, interspersed with red apples, lemons, sticks of

cinnamon, and sprays of bay laurel. The stable yard was full of carts and waggon, showing that it was a busy day at the Cock, and thereby explaining how the coachman's horn had escaped notice. A lad was carrying a faggot into the house, and the windows of the parlour and long room reflected the dancing light of the fires within. It was a sight that gave strength to the labouring parson, and he struggled up to the side of Blase, saying, between the necessary pauses for fetching breath :

“There, my young friend!—will you talk to me now—of your highways, and your coaches—and the like abominations?—Can im—agination conceive a—more thrilling subject for—painter or poet, than a—good comfortable English inn after a fast of four hours—and a ride of forty leagues—on a rumbling, jolting coach?—Devil take the bags.”

But pleasant as the inn was externally, it was still more delightful to the sensuous soul of Mr. Tickel within. He raised his head and inhaled the savoury odour that came from the kitchen, which could be seen at the end of the passage, with many women-servants bustling to and fro, and a laden spit turning slowly before a large fire. He looked round with approval at the cases of stuffed birds and beasts and fishes that covered the walls, and lent his ear to the cheerful clatter of knife and fork and plate, which formed the accompaniment of laughter and high-pitched conversation that came from the long room, where the company was assembled.

A servant led Blase to a private room, while Mr. Tickel made his way into the kitchen to make sure of their dinner.

“Just in the very nick of time,” he said, when he rejoined Blase; “another five minutes and the gentry in the long room

would have cleared the spits for us. However, I've secured half a roast pig, and as pretty a little goose, with sage and onions, and apple sauce, as ever you could wish to see."

"That's very well to begin with."

"Oh, I looked after the accessories. There's a damson tart and a boiled custard to follow; to say nothing of half a Cheshire cheese, young celery, and a dish of walnuts to go with the port."

"You shall ask a blessing, parson; for, without that, I fear this little dinner will make us ill."

"I fear nothing. With a nip of French brandy in the middle, and a pipe of tobacco after, one may eat such a dinner and think with gusto of a snack before going to bed."

"What's the company in the room below. Did you hear?"

"Ay, and saw too. I caught a glimpse of them as I passed from the kitchen; as

jolly a crew of rogues and vagabonds as you'll find out of Wapping. There's been a ring fight between Devon and Dorset, for fifty guineas a side, and the victor and his friends are being regaled by his backer and patron, the squire."

"What squire? Is he of this county?"

"I suppose so, for Dorset is triumphant below, and Devon is taken off to the nearest doctor. I didn't hear his name, but I saw him—a bloated pig of a man, with a face so bleared and red, that I should not have known him from the boxer by his side, but for the dress of the former, and a slice of raw beef tied over the eye of the latter. The hero's a butcher, if I may judge by his smock; and the squire's one of your old-fashioned English gentlemen, who pride themselves on being about thirty years behind the times. He wears a full-bottomed wig and a flowered coat. He had his arm round

the butcher's neck, and was feeding him from his own plate like a child, the fellow's knuckles being so cut about that he can't help himself. It was enough to make one die of laughing to see him."

"Enough to make one sick of disgust, rather."

"Why, so it is, to be sure, Blase; and the sooner these rustics can be taught to fight and get drunk like gentlemen the better."

Here the conversation was turned into another channel by the arrival of dinner, and was wholly gastronomic until the last plate had been carried away. Mr. Tickel loved to talk upon any subject, but most he enjoyed that kind of table-talk which refers to eating and drinking. It made no difference to him that Blase only answered direct questions, and these in monosyllables; he enlarged upon geese and roast pig, with their sauces and stuffings, and being well contented with

what he himself said, had no reason to remark his companion's silence, or think the conversation uninteresting. Indeed, Blase paid no more attention to the parson's talk than he did to the noise in the room below; he heard both without distinguishing the meaning of the sounds. He had fallen into a reverie, and pursued a vein of thought, irrespective of the parson's endless disquisition. Suddenly, as he was cracking a nut, and Tickel ceased speaking to empty his glass, he said :

“How did you come to know my father, parson?”

“Know him, my young friend? Why, I know him no more than the pope. To the best of my knowledge I've never clapped eyes on him.”

“Then how came you to be my governor eight years ago?”

“Sir Gilbert's chaplain, Father Dominick, engaged me.”

“What do you know of him?”

“Almost as little as I know of your father.”

“How did you become acquainted?”

“Through a Mr. Pinx, who was a gentleman commoner—a merry fellow, and my friend in the old Oxford days. But I was speaking, my young friend, of an excellent method for the dressing of mushrooms.”

“And while you have been talking of mushrooms, I have been thinking on my past life. Had I enjoyed a sober moment since coming to man's estate, I should have thought upon it before now.”

“You have much to be thankful for.”

“Come, parson, be serious. I want to know how you came to be my governor.”

Mr. Tickel hesitated, first humming a bar of “Bobbing Joan” as he peeled his walnut, then casting a furtive glance of his twinkling little grey eyes at Blase, as

if to make sure that he was in earnest, and again fixing his attention upon the walnut. Finally, he finished his port, turned his chair about, set his feet on the high brass fender, and twiddling his thumbs slowly, said :

“There was a time, my young friend, when your demand would have necessitated prevarication, but now that we know each other so well, I see no occasion for reserve. I was in trouble, Blase—in such trouble that I could no longer look upon hardship with philosophical resignation. It seemed to me that Heaven was unjustly severe in punishing my faults, and I was tempted to brave the everlasting displeasure by leaping into the Thames, and terminating my mortal misery. Fancy what starvation is to a man of my stomach. I declare I have eaten crusts that the beggars had cast aside.”

“But how came you to be so poor?”

“By my natural deficiency in cunning, avarice, misanthropy, and such-like vices, Blase. I will not pain you with a detailed account of the events that led to my degradation from the office of vicar in the parish of St. Bidulph; 'tis a tragic story of a bottle and of a faithless woman, of a squeamish congregation and of a heartless bishop; suffice it that I was compelled to quit the vicarage, and all the little household treasures it contained, together with my wardrobe and library, in the dead of night, and with not a penny in my pocket. For the news having got abroad that I was suspended, my creditors took out a writ against me and put it in the hands of a bum-bailiff, whom by a happy chance I saw from my parlour window lurking under the tavern arch t'other side of the road; otherwise, instead of being here now, I should probably have been rotting in the Fleet. The shifts I was put to in order

that I might live without money, would make but a stale story, more instructive than amusing. Let it pass. There came a day when my last expedient failed, and I starved. Then it was that I had the good fortune to see my old fellow-commoner, Pinx. He had altered greatly, but the eyes of the needy are ever quick to recognize the traits of an old friend. It was with more difficulty that I brought Pinx to believe that I was in truth Joseph Tickel. When, however, he was assured of my identity he took me into a tavern, treated me to a handsome dinner, promised to do his best in my behalf, and slipped a couple of guineas into my hand for present necessities. I saw he was a comfortable man, and he told me he had settled at Rockford, in Dorsetshire, as an attorney. He promised to write as soon as he could find anything to suit me, and four days after I found a letter at the coffee-house bidding me meet

him at Squire's coffee-house the following Saturday, by eleven o'clock in the forenoon. You may be sure I was not behind time. Just after the stroke of the hour Pinx came in, followed by a tall sallow man, whom he introduced as Mr. Dominick. We sat down all together at a table, and Mr. Dominick opened up the affair at once. He told me he had heard the history of my misfortunes, and found by inquiries that the account of my transgressions was not exaggerated. He said that although his creed was opposed to mine, yet as it was the duty of every Christian to raise the fallen, and lead into the path of virtue those who had strayed from it, he felt moved to give me what assistance was in his power, trusting that the punishment it had pleased Heaven to inflict upon me would serve as a warning for the future. I assured him with all the eloquence I could command that my penitence was sincere

—and indeed, Blase, I did not overstep the truth; for who should more repent his follies than he who is paying the penalty of 'em? Mr. Dominick then told me that the post he intended for me was that of governor to a young gentleman who was leaving college to make the grand tour. If you believe me, Blase, I was like one stupefied to hear this unexpected announcement; for I had looked at the best to being made a clerk, a bailiff, a butler, and I assure you I wouldn't have rejected the office of turn-spit at that time. 'The name of the young gentleman about to be placed in your care,' said Mr. Dominick, 'is Blase Godwin; he is the son of Sir Gilbert Godwin, baronet, whose chaplain I am. Mr. Blase has estranged himself from his father by the violence of his temper, by the wildness of his inclinations, and by his apostasy to that religion which it has been the pride of the

Godwin family to sustain ; nevertheless he desires that his education shall want nothing to make him worthy of the title he must one day possess, and to that end he would have him visit the principal cities of Europe not closed by hostilities, and partake freely in those amusements which are suitable to young men of his age and condition. For these purposes he will be amply supplied with money. Should he require more than he carries with him, you have but to write to me and bills for the sum wanted will be forwarded by courier. Your own expenses will of course be paid, and in addition you will receive sixty pounds per annum. Your debts in London shall also be discharged.' These were the very words he used, for they made such an impression upon my mind at the time, that I do believe they will never be effaced from my memory. And thus, my young friend, was I raised from

disgrace and destitution, to a position of ease and trust."

"And this he did, knowing how you left St. Bidulph's?"

"This he did, maugre the most damning facts, and the most damnable fiction my enemies could find to my discredit. Such was his charity."

"Such was his villainy rather," cried Blase, grasping the poker and giving the fire a furious dig.

"I have since considered his action imprudent, Blase."

"Nonsense! That papist is too crafty for imprudence. 'Twas a scheme for my destruction."

"What then, lad?" cried Tickel in an altered voice, turning with affectionate warmth towards Blase. "What has the furnace done but proved the metal sterling?"

Blase laughed contemptuously. The

parson after a minute of grave silence said :

“Perhaps my meaner vices have served in the place of virtues, Blase, and warned you from following in my footsteps.”

“I have never thought so unkindly, parson. God forbid you should be worse than I deem myself. But I say again, ’twas a villainous thing to do, and the act of Father Dominick was only less cruel than his intent. For what surer means could a man desire for the ruin of a high-spirited, reckless lad of twenty, than to put an almost unlimited supply of money at his disposal, and place him under the sole control of a man with the reputation for loose living that you bore ? ”

“Looked at from your point of view, ’twas as sinful a piece of charity as one can imagine. But it seems to me your father was not blameless.”

“My father was ever under the dominion

of his chaplain. What the priest advised, my father acceded to. You may be sure Father Dominick was not wanting in specious arguments to justify his actions."

"What reason has he, think you, Blase, for wishing your ruin?"

"That is what perplexes me. But I'll find out, and expose his villainy to my father."

"For the Lord's sake be careful, my boy. Let us get the old gentleman's forgiveness before we show him what a fool he's been."

Blase made no response, and both became silent.

The mirth in the long room below had grown more and more boisterous during the last half-hour; and now a song was succeeded by such a roar of acclamation, mingled with clapping of hands, stamping of feet, and jingling of glasses, that they could not have conversed had they been minded to. The clamour was intolerable

to Blase, whose irritated mind needed calm for reflection. Turning impatiently to Mr. Tickel, he said :

“This is insupportable. Go downstairs, parson, and if you judge that the riot is likely to continue, order a chaise and let us get on at once.”

After a brief absence Mr. Tickel returned, and said that as far as he could judge the company was not likely to give over drinking until the cellar was empty, and that no conveyance was to be had for love or money, every nag in the stables being engaged—“Thank Heaven!” he murmured under his breath.

“But,” added he, “the squire, hearing there were visitors in the house, very civilly begged the host to present his compliments and ask us to do him the honour of drinking a sneaker of punch in his company.”

As Blase had not yet overcome his love

of company, and, like an old soldier, greatly preferred mixing in the thick of the *mêlée* to standing hard by inactive, he consented, after a few moments' consideration, to accept the invitation—an invitation, by-the-by, which originated entirely from the landlord, the squire being too drunk to compose an intelligible sentence or to distinguish one of his guests from another.

The two gentlemen then descended and entered the long room, where the landlord was at that moment singing the concluding stanza of a new song upon the victory of Lord Howe over the Dutch, set to the old tune of "When friends combine," and seated themselves beside him at the foot of the table, in the chairs placed for them by the drawer.

A dense cloud of tobacco smoke hung over the company; the four candles sluggishly burning in the heavy atmosphere gave so feeble a light that the eye had

to grow accustomed to the obscurity to distinguish the surrounding objects. A confused glimmer of faces along the dark oak table turned towards the singer was all that Blase saw at first. The landlord, a burly man, stood with a candle drawn near him, and the song, printed on a long slip of thin paper and folded, held at arm's length, and a little beyond the wick of the candle. His cravat was loosened, and he marked emphasis to the words he sang with the stem of the long clay pipe in his left hand. A bowl of punch stood before him. Another bowl was placed at the further end of the board before the squire, whose bald head was pillowed on his arms, which were crossed upon the table: a careful waiter had tied his wig to the back rail of his chair. Down the table were opposite rows of brown mugs and papers of tobacco; behind them lines of white pipes led up to lines of red faces,

all more or less brutal in their fleshiness and their absence of expression.

“Chorus, gentlemen, if you please,” said the landlord, having finished his stanza; and he held the song so that Blase and the parson might get the benefit of it. Then there was a movement in the lines of pipes, and the company roared out in such words as they could remember, and such melody as they could make, the chorus in which the new-comers were supposed to join.

Mr. Tickel fell into the humour at once, and lifting up his voice sang :

“Then fill up your mugs to the health of Lord
Howe,
And so let our enemies come ;
While long may they flourish, the spade and the
plough,
So here’s to the fife and the drum.”

When this had been repeated twice, there was a moment of stillness only broken by a loud snore from the squire, and then the applause rose in a deafening

tumult of sound, while the landlord, radiant but self-possessed, seated himself and relit his pipe with the philosophic calm of a man accustomed to singing a good song, and receiving due acknowledgment.

"As pretty an inconsequent chorus as ever I read," said Mr. Tickel.

"Yes, sir. 'tis a noble song; and if I could only find a rhyme to Duncan, it would fit well for this new victory, as our fleet has made over the foreigner."

Some one rose at the further end of the table and said

"Mäster landlord, zir, you do ought to zing thic thäre zong again."

A smoker on the other side of the table seconded the proposal, adding that 'twas a mortal pity the squire slept so sound he couldn't hear it.

"Right you are, Mäster Tomkuns; zpecially as 'tis all about vightun. 'Twould suit his honour's lardship better 'an most.

Vor I du think there bean't a mortal man so vond o' vightun as what he be."

"Why, I do mind as he's guv two hund'ed pound to thic thäre sumscription for vightun the French; and like enough 'tis true, for I've known un to spend a matter of ten pound a night on a covey of partridges and a zettun dog. Lor' a mussy. how he do snöare, to *be* zure!"

"Well, if you will have the song again, gentlemen," the landlord said, seeing that the conversation was drifting away from his performance.

"Squire should hear it, though," remonstrated Mr. Tompkins. "Gi' un a dig i' the ribs, butcher."

"Haller in his ear; he'll be right mad mărrow mărն to think there's been a zong about vightun and he not hearn it. Cry Tallyhow; that'll rouse un!"

The butcher, whose hands, still suffering from the encounter of the afternoon, were

bandaged with a belcher, gave the squire a vigorous nudge in the side with his elbow, at the same time crying—

“Yoicks! Your worshup, Tallyhow! Tallyhow! Sir Gilbert.”

At this sound the squire lifted his head, and before he could drop it again the landlord recommenced his song.

Blase looked steadily at the dazed, bloated, sensual face at the other end of the table, and then pushed back his chair and marched out of the room.

“What’s the matter, my young friend; what’s amiss?” asked Mr. Tickel, overtaking him at the door.

“What’s amiss?” cried Blase, fiercely. “Don’t you see; didn’t you hear? The pig you spoke of is my father.”

CHAPTER III.

AN EXTRAORDINARY ENCOUNTER WHICH
HAPPENED ON THE ROAD TO ROCKFORD.

“How far is it to the next inn on the road to Rockford?” Blase asked of the landlady, who was reposing after her labours in the bar parlour.

“A matter of four mile, sir.”

“We will walk it, parson.”

“With those bags, Blase?” asked Mr. Tickel, in a tone of dismay.

“Curse the bags; let a boy carry them.”

“I’d rather carry them myself; there’s not a stable-boy in the kingdom that isn’t in league with a highwayman.”

“As you please. Stay here if you will. I cannot.”

“Stop here without you? Not I. Wait, I will put a few things in one valise, and we can send for the rest to-morrow.”

Blase turned away impatiently, paid his score, and left the inn. Outside he walked up and down until Mr. Tickel, having hurriedly made his arrangements, joined him.

“I have brought your pocket-pistols, my young friend,” he said, handing the weapons carefully to Blase. “Have a care; they are charged. Look to the priming before we get out of the light. Heaven grant you may not have to use ’em! Won’t you borrow a lanthorn, Blase? ’tis awesome dark.”

“Pooh! The road is clear enough. We’ve need neither of pistols nor lanthorn; we shall meet no one. Come, you are not an old woman.”

“I wish I were with all my heart; I shouldn’t be called upon to walk four country miles along a murderous bye-road

at seven o'clock of a dark night. And let me tell you, Blase, that you are doing wrong to leave your father in this manner, and that I consider your action inconsistent with your professions of reformation."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Don't be angry, my young friend. You have laid the blame of your ruin upon my shoulders, and reproached me with having neglected to put a check upon your youthful follies. I may have been over lenient; but I cannot see you evading what I may call a sacred duty without protest. It was your duty to reconcile your father and obtain his forgiveness, and you have neglected your best opportunity; for what better could you have than when the old gentleman is in his cups. You should have stuck to him Blase, gone home with him, and never left him till you had his forgiveness and a thumping bill on his banker."

" 'Tis no longer a question of asking his forgiveness," Blase said sternly.

" Why, no. You have the advantage of him now, to be sure ; and if you can only get at him before he has got over this bout, you may make a merit of overlooking his faults and taking a couple of thousand or so to say no more about it."

Blase gave himself up to his own sombre reflections, and paid no heed to the parson, who, from his early vocation as a preacher at St. Bidulph's, had used himself to inattention, and was content to deliver his wise observations to his own appreciative ear, and so beguile the tedious hour.

They proceeded in this manner for about a couple of miles, and then coming to a steep hill the parson's monologue became disjointed, and finally stopped as they approached the brow. There his laboured breathing attracting the attention of Blase, he proposed that they should

rest awhile, and the parson being nothing loath they seated themselves on a felled tree by the roadside.

The road before them was level and straight. On one side it lay open to a patch of ragged, waste land ; on the other it skirted a wood. The moon had risen above the horizon, and although it was yet shrouded by a bank of cloud, it shed sufficient light to reveal the road for some distance ahead. There was not the slightest motion in the trees or the fallen leaves by the roadside, for the wind had dropped. Suddenly the parson, who had been mopping the perspiration from his face with an occasional "pish" and "phew," stopped abruptly as a sharp metallic click caught his ear, and turning to Blase asked in a smothered tone of alarm :

"What was that, Blase?"

Blase had his hands in his pockets, whence came another click as he replied :

“Nothing to be alarmed about; as I carry pistols they may as well be cocked. There’s somebody on the road before us!”

“Good Lord, deliver us!” murmured the parson fervently, as he looked along the road.

“Come along,” Blase said, rising.

“What madness! Let us get behind a thicket until the road is clear.”

“Nonsense!” laughed Blase. “What, man! afraid of a couple of yokels returning from their labour?”

“Labourers going home two hours after sundown! Nothing of the sort. There’s not an honest rustic that isn’t abed and asleep by this time.”

“This is odd,” said Blase, stepping on one side and looking along the road. “I saw two figures distinctly when we were seated a minute ago, and now I can see none.”

“An ambush, I’ll stake my life. For

the love of Heaven let us get into the wood."

"Not I. The probability is that they are as afraid of us as you of them, and have taken to the wood themselves."

"Let us hide t'other side, then. Here's a thicket most convenient."

Disregarding the parson's suggestion, Blase walked on with his hands in his pockets and his fingers on the triggers of his pistols, while Mr. Tickel made for the protection of the thicket. Thence he watched the advance of Blase until his figure grew indistinct and it seemed to him that he had passed the dangerous point at which the two men had disappeared. Then the dread of being left to follow alone, and the possibility of being discovered in his hiding-place, forced him to the desperate resolution of taking to the road again and overtaking Blase as quickly as possible. His tongue clave to

the roof of his mouth, his knees knocked against each other as he moved, the blood sang in his ears as he stepped out into the open part. It was, however, encouraging to see that Blase was waiting for him, standing in the middle of the road a hundred yards in advance, and he hurried forward as quickly as his trembling legs could carry him.

But scarcely had he made a dozen steps when there was a flash that seemed to blind him, a bang that stunned him, and from the wood in front a couple of men sprang into the road roaring to him to yield his money or his life. With a presence of mind which, when he came to look back upon the affair, the parson regarded as nothing less than astonishing, he dropped the valise, turned about, and took to his heels.

The footpads made no attempt to overtake him, being more concerned in their

own safety; for scarcely had they scrambled through the brambles and into the road, than they perceived Blase bearing down upon them with all speed.

He who had fired at once made a leap to get over the briars and into the wood, and the other, grabbing up the valise, was about to follow, when Blase, having got within a dozen yards, stopped, fired, and had the good fortune to send a ball through the rascal's leg. With a howl of pain and fright he dropped the valise, leapt into the wood, and disappeared.

Blase listened. A faint "tippity-top, tippity-top" down the hill told him that the parson was still in full retreat; but for a second or two no other sound reached his ear. Then a movement among the brambles by the roadside, with the snapping of twigs, attracted his attention; and as he drew towards the spot a voice cried, "Quarter, your honour—quarter!"

“Come out, rascal,” said Blase ; and at this bidding the man who had first fled disentangled his foot from the growth that had tripped him up, rose from the ground, and presented himself before Blase with his empty hands extended. “Who was it fired ?” asked Blase.

“I fired, sir.”

“Is the other rascal armed ?”

“No, sir ; we had but the one pistol, and that’s in the bush there somewhere.”

Satisfied of the parson’s safety, Blase bade the man pick up the valise and march on in front, promising to put a ball into his body if he attempted to escape.

Without a word the man took up the valise which his fellow had dropped, and then marched on in front. Blase tried to get a glimpse of his face, but the light was insufficient, and moreover the man hung his head either from shame or purposely to conceal his features. It was

noticeable that he did not speak like a countryman, nor with the raking voice of an habitual criminal; his figure was that of a man of forty; a rolling gait and a pigtail gave him the appearance of a seaman. It seemed to Blase that he must be a footpad rather from necessity than choice, and he was beginning to question what he ought to do with his prisoner, when the man, stopping and turning about, said :

“Master, what are you going to do with me?”

“My present intention is to hand you over to the first constable I can find.”

“That is to say, you will have me hanged. But you spoke just now of putting lead into me.”

“If you try to escape, I certainly will,” said Blase; and he took out his pistol, for the man had set down the valise.

“You are a fair shot, master—I saw that

by the way you nicked my mate under disadvantages—and the only favour I'll ask you is to cover me well on the head or the heart before you fire, kick my corpse into a ditch after, and say nothing about it at the inn along the road here. Do this for the sake of charity, and God will bless you for it. Take aim, master, for I am going."

He moved slowly towards the ditch by the road as he spoke, with his arms behind him and his head up, that Blase might not miss his aim.

"Wait," said Blase; "I am not an executioner. I shall not fire to kill you."

"'Twill be a refinement of cruelty, sir, to wound me with a ball to-night that I may be hung with a rope to-morrow."

The words and the manner in which they were spoken were to Blase conclusive evidence that the man was no ordinary footpad.

“And if I kill you, why do you wish the people of the inn to know nothing of it?”

“My daughter lies there, and”—he spoke with effort—“the poor child loves me.”

“Then she does not know the way of life you have taken to?”

“Not she—a little fool!” He passed the back of his forefinger over his cheek. “She’s just as fond as her mother was; though perhaps other women are no wiser, for which of ’em will believe wrong of a husband or a father that she loves?”

Blase put the pistol in his pocket.

“If this is not a lie you shall get no harm from me,” he said. “Come, we will go to the inn together.”

The man accepted this proposal without the slightest sign of reluctance, and further expressed his gratitude in a few broken sentences with such emotion that Blase felt convinced of his sincerity, and was

prompted as much by sympathy as curiosity to inquire, after they had walked some paces side by side in silence, through what accident he had come to attempt the robbery.

“Is this the first robbery you have attempted?” he asked.

“The first, upon my soul, as it shall be the last,” replied the man.

“Who was your accomplice?”

“A man of these parts, whom I met by one of those unfortunate accidents which have beset me through life, and brought me to my present condition. ’Twas he who proposed the expedition, setting forth how, by a little noise and bluster, we might succeed in extorting a few crowns from a party of country gentlemen, who about this time should be returning from a ring fight, and would in all likelihood be so overcome with liquor that they could offer no resistance, nor detect that our intentions

were less murderous than they appeared. For I assure you, sir, the pistol which my acquaintance had employed for the scaring of crows was charged only with powder. The events which led to my accepting this proposal, although they cannot exonerate me, might be accepted as an excuse for my fault; and for that reason, sir, I shall be glad to recount them if you will have the patience to hear me."

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN HUTCHINS MAKES A CURIOUS REVELATION.

BLASE said he should be glad to hear of any redeeming circumstances.

“Well, sir,” said the man, “I will begin by telling you that my name is John Hutchins, and I was born on the day his present majesty came to the throne. My father was a mercer in Holborn, and although himself a thrifty and industrious man of business, he was excessively indulgent to me, and allowed me to indulge in pleasures which gave me an abiding distaste for hard work. When his friends remonstrated, he would say, ‘Let the lad have his fling; many a good horse is

spoiled by being put too young to the collar.' And so matters went on until my poor father being seized with a disorder of the inside which carried him off in four and twenty hours, I, at the age of eighteen, was called upon to direct a business of which I knew nothing, and which I cordially detested. For some months the new pleasure of gaining money kept me to my shop, but at the end of that time the old pleasure of spending it took me away. Little by little I neglected my affairs, until the time came when I spent every night of the week in idle pleasures, leaving my shop to the mercy of servants, who, I need not tell you, sir, fleeced me right and left. To cap my folly, I became enamoured of a young lady, Miss Betsy Warren, who was then playing small parts at the little theatre in the Haymarket, and before I was twenty years of age, I made her my wife, and insisted upon her retiring

from the stage, where she received too many compliments from the gentlemen for my peace of mind. To reconcile her to her loss in that respect, I took a handsome country house at Hackney, and set up a chariot in which I drove to my business in Holborn. You can understand, sir, that no business in the world can be conducted long in this fashion, and that the tradesman who cannot reconcile himself to living over his shop, need take but a short lease of his house. My custom fell off, my creditors became suspicious, and such was the state into which my books had fallen that I could not tell how I stood. However, one morning, while I was still abed at Hackney, a foot messenger came with the news that my house in Holborn was burned to the ground. Then my creditors took my affairs into their own hands, and after some little delay, it was found that my debts exceeded my assets by a thousand

pounds, and it was only by the leniency of my creditors that I escaped being thrown into prison for debt. With tears of mortification and regret in my eyes, I put my Betsy, and our daughter, then an infant in arms, into a hackney coach, and bade the driver carry us to Dean Street, in Soho, where my wife's mother was then living. From her we could expect but little, for the old lady was paralyzed and had no more money than was sufficient to maintain herself; but I proposed to leave my wife and child in her care for a few days, while I went into the country to beseech the help of my sister-in-law, Harriet. This sister, I must tell you, had also played at the theatre, but, with better fortune than my poor Betsy, had married a country baronet, Sir Gilbert Godwin, who has a seat about a dozen miles from here, and is the very man my confederate and I were about to waylay this evening."

Involuntarily Blase made an exclamation of surprise at hearing his father's name in connection with this history.

“’Tis odd indeed, sir,” continued Hutchins, putting his own construction upon the cry—“yes, odd indeed, that you find me this night prepared to rob a man whom I may call my brother-in-law ; but I hope to explain it clearly to you. I myself had seen neither the baronet nor my sister-in-law Harriet, for she was married and removed from the stage some time before I became acquainted with my Betsy ; and the reason that I went instead of my wife to beg her assistance, was, that Harriet being of a violent temper, and my wife none of the most submissive characters in the world, the two hated each other intensely, and never met without quarrelling. At Godwin’s Moat—which I must tell you, sir, is the name of this baronet’s seat—I was met by the baronet’s chaplain, a papist

named Father Dominick, who refused to let me see the baronet or his wife, but promised to help me if I would return to London immediately and await his arrival. I accepted this condition, and the day after my return to London, he met us in Dean Street, and offered to give us three hundred pounds if we in return would give him our solemn promise never again to importune Harriet or make ourselves known to her husband. I would have taken my oath on the spot, but my wife stoutly refused to make any such promise. ‘Very good,’ said Father Dominick, ‘then I shall trust to your generosity and to your self-interest; for mark me,’ said he, laying the notes on the table and holding up his forefinger in admonition, ‘if you attempt to interfere with the peace of Sir Gilbert Godwin or his lady, I shall terminate the persecution in a manner which will cause you to repent your act to the end of your life.’ My

wife was greatly impressed with this threat, for she knew something of the man's temper and disposition, and was convinced that he would hesitate at no means that would answer his purpose. 'Twas his axiom that the end justifies the means.

“My wife went back to the theatre, where I also obtained employment at a small remuneration; but poverty could not cure me of extravagance, and my wife was just as careless as I; so that when, in the spring of 1790, I fell sick of the small-pox, we hadn't enough money between us to pay a nurse to watch by me while my wife went to the play-house, and but for the generosity of Mr. Colman, I know not how our immediate necessities would have been tided over. When my wife dared not tax his kindness any further, she resolved, despite her fear of Father Dominick, to apply again to her sister. Eleven years

had passed since we received the first gift, and during that time we had neither seen nor heard anything of Harriet or Father Dominick; but my wife still feared the man, and only her concern for me made her overcome her disinclination to encounter his displeasure. She wrote to her sister: Father Dominick replied to her letter in person. He refused to give anything, but offered to lend another sum of three hundred pounds on her note of hand payable at three months. My poor Betsy wrote the note as he bade her, and took the money.

“Well, sir, the consequence of this act you shall presently see. Three months later, I was allured into Wapping by a letter holding out the prospect of an engagement, and there seized by a press-gang; and in reply to a letter I addressed from Spithead to my wife, I received the terrible news that she was imprisoned in

the Fleet for the debt to Father Dominick. Thus had this man executed his threat. Ill luck attended me even at sea, but of that I will say nothing. I have only to tell that, my time being up, I obtained my discharge, and hurrying on to London arrived there only in time to see my poor Betsy's corpse. She had died of privation, and a disease of the lungs brought on by the miasma of that dreadful prison. I had not even the sad consolation of hearing her bid me adieu, or of catching the parting smile upon her wasted cheek—once so fresh and full. Happily for her, poor soul, our little Peggy was with her at the last, and received the sweet message of remembrance she left for me."

Hutchins ceased to speak, but after a few minutes' silence, he sobbed once or twice like a child that has wept. Then he pulled out his handkerchief, and wiping his eyes, impatiently said :

“Where’s the use of crying? the poor soul suffers no more. There’s an end of it; nothing can bring her back to me, or undo the past. Well, sir, to get back to my yarn, as we sailors call it. When I had buried my poor Betsy, I left my child in good hands, and went to the pay-office to draw my money, where I met a couple of my messmates, who persuaded me afterwards to go to a tavern, and forget my troubles over a can of flip, and drink better luck for the future. But the drink was far from bringing me better luck, and when we separated, I felt that I had taken more than was good for me. As I was going along, trying to walk straight and look sober, and fetching myself up against a post when I found myself steering out of the course, a sleek old gentleman with a clergyman’s hat and bands took me by the arm, and begged me to take a cup of coffee to dissipate the effect of the strong

liquor, telling me that he was a missionary set to watch for tars leaving the pay-office, and protect them from the robbers that beset them. I thanked him for his kindness, telling him that I had great need to take care of my money, and was sorry to find I had drunk too much; and we stepped into a coffee-house, when he called for two dishes of coffee, and was particular to stir up my portion, and see that it was not too hot before I tasted it; then he bade me drink it off, and began a long sermon, in the midst of which I fell asleep. When I awoke he was gone, and so was my money. I thought I should go mad under this combination of misfortunes, and indeed I believe that I was for some days not master of myself. An awful desire to take the life of the man who had been instrumental to my wife's death possessed me, and I believe that if I had met him then I should have torn him to pieces; and this mad thirst for

vengeance was still upon me when I set out from London with my daughter to walk hither. I had some loose silver which had escaped the hands of the wretch who drugged me in the coffee-house, and this afforded us shelter and food until we arrived here, where the last shilling was paid for our dinner. But, thanks be to God, my bloody intentions towards Father Dominick have passed away, through the influence of my Peggy; for, looking in her young face, I think of her mother's fate, of the dangers that surround her, and my duty to shield her. But do not conclude, sir, that because I have overcome my inclinations to do that wicked papist a bodily mischief I hate him less, and cease to harbour feelings of revenge. I have not the Christian temper to forgive him the injuries he has done me and mine. I will not leave this place until I have punished him."

"My poor fellow," said Blase kindly,

“what power have you to punish this man, except by brute force? Could you prove that he was instrumental to your imprisonment, and that the loan to your wife was but a trick to confine her within the walls of a prison, the law would not touch him, and he can defy public indignation while he is under the protection of Sir Gilbert.”

“It is that protection that I will overthrow. It is through Sir Gilbert he shall be punished. I have not told you why Father Dominick was so anxious that I should be shot at sea, and that my wife should end her days in a gaol—why he insisted upon our entire separation from Sir Gilbert Godwin. It was because we possessed a secret which he feared my wife’s impetuous tongue would reveal; a secret which, revealed to Sir Gilbert, would have ruined his priest. The three hundred pounds he gave us in our first

need was hush-money. This secret you shall know, and you may then judge if I have no power to punish that villain. I have told you that Harriet played at the same theatre with Betsy, that they were rivals, and hated each other. They vied with each other in the costliness of their dresses, but Harriet was the less scrupulous in the way she obtained them. She received presents from a gentleman who came up at intervals from the country, on the pretext of business; and she was in effect his mistress. These facts were known to Betsy, for it was impossible for one sister to guard a single circumstance of her life from the jealous eye of the other; and she discovered, further, that the gentleman's name was Dominick, and that he was the chaplain of Sir Gilbert Godwin of Godwin's Moat, in Dorsetshire. This acquaintance lasted for a year, and then Harriet won another lover,

and this was none other than Sir Gilbert Godwin himself. The fact was perfectly well known to Father Dominick, but the baronet of course knew nothing of his priest's previous acquaintance with Harriet; and to keep this secret from him she conciliated her sister with repeated gifts. The baronet took a house for his mistress in Hampton, and there he spent the best part of his time—leaving her for a few days in each month to go into Dorsetshire, where he had a young wife and child. His estate, his household, and his unfortunate wife he left completely under the control of Father Dominick. The priest once or twice took the occasion of the baronet's presence in Dorsetshire to post to Hampton and visit his former mistress. My wife, Betsy, bribed Harriet's servant to keep a watch on her, and send all the news she could gather. Six months of this double dealing went on, and then, while Sir

Gilbert was at Hampton, Father Dominick brought word to him that his wife had been murdered."

"Murdered!" exclaimed Blase.

"Murdered, sir. God forbid I should charge that wicked priest with one more crime than he has to answer for, but the events that followed have led me to believe that if Father Dominick did not actually strike the blow himself, he was party to the murder."

"What did follow?"

"Within two months he married his mistress to Sir Gilbert, thus promoting her to an honourable position, and bringing her under the same roof with himself."

"Great God!" exclaimed Blase. "Can such iniquity escape punishment?"

"Not if I have power to bring about a retribution."

"Are you sure my—are you sure that Sir Gilbert's first wife was murdered?"

“There is no doubt of it, sir. The landlord of the inn we are coming to remembers the facts, for he was on the jury at the inquest. 'Tis a fact well known in these parts.”

Was it for that reason, Blase asked himself, that he had never been suffered to remain for long at Godwin's Moat, or to promenade in its vicinity unaccompanied by Father Dominick?

These speculations yet occupied his mind when the lights of the inn came within sight.

“Here is the Bag o' Nails, sir,” said John Hutchins, uneasily; “the inn where my daughter lies. I left it under the pretence of seeking a loan from a friend in Rockford. What excuse shall I make for returning empty-handed, and with you?”

“Make your mind easy on that score,” replied Blase; “I will satisfy the landlord's

demands. And look you, Mr. Hutchins, I shall make inquiries into the truth of your story to-night, and if I find you have not deceived me, I may be of use to you to-morrow. In the meanwhile, keep guard upon your tongue, and let no one know what you have revealed to me."

John Hutchins promised discretion, and renewed his expressions of gratitude; and then having reached the Bag o' Nails, the two entered that inn.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE SCENE IS SHIFTED TO THE
BAG O' NAILS.

THE Bag o' Nails, which stood just outside the village of Rockford, was the house of call for those respectable tradesmen and gentlemen who managed the affairs of the parish; and this being the evening for the discussion of parochial politics, the parlour was well lit with candles and a glowing log that burnt in the chimney, around which a dozen worthy men were seated in settles and armchairs, the landlord—himself a churchwarden, and a man much respected for his sagacity, experience, and honesty—occupying a chair in the centre

of the semicircle. Each man had his dram and his pipe, and tempered the rigour of public duty with innocent indulgence in creature comforts.

At the sound of the little bell attached to the door the landlord rose and went out into the sanded passage, where Blase and John Hutchins stood.

“Your servant, sir, your servant,” he said, respectfully taking in with an accustomed eye those niceties of dress and mien which proclaimed Blase a gentleman by birth and breeding. “What may it please you to command?”

“Accommodation for the night.”

“The best I have, sir.—Thomas, wait upon this gentleman to the rose chamber, and light a fire quickly.—But mayhap it will please you, sir, to join our company in the parlour, while your room is warming?”

“With pleasure; and, landlord,” Blase

added, dropping his voice, "this good fellow tells me he is in your debt."

"That is true, sir. He and his daughter have had bed and board since yesterday, and I have seen but a shilling of his money."

"Be good enough to let him have what is necessary, and charge the expense to me. He has rendered me a service on the road."

"I am heartily glad that he has made a friend, for surely he needs one badly enough. I am not hard-hearted, sir, though I may have given him a sharp word or two; but we who live by our gains must gain by our living, as I say. I assure you, sir," he added, as they left Hutchins and walked towards the parlour, "I have a great pity for him and his daughter, who is a decent little body, and seems greatly concerned for her father. May I make bold to inquire what service he has done you, sir?"

"My friend and I were attacked by a

couple of footpads, about two miles from here."

"Goody heart! Footpads! And what has become of your friend, sir?"

"He saved himself by his heels, and probably has returned to the inn from which we started an hour ago. Of the rascals who attacked us, one, I believe, is marked with a ball from my pistol; the other—got off scot free."

They entered the parlour, where the landlord introduced the visitor to his friends, and placed a chair for him by his side. Naturally the attempted robbery formed an admirable subject for discussion, and Blase was still occupied in answering questions relative to the affair, when a sound of wheels and many voices outside was followed by the tinkling of the door bell and a noisy irruption of sturdy countrymen, armed with stout sticks and pitchforks. These men formed a body-

guard to the Reverend Mr. Tickel, who seemed to be in greater peril from the officious care of the friends he had called upon for protection, than from the foe he had fled from; for being still three parts drunk, they hustled him about from side to side in their anxiety to stand by him, and by their good intentions threatened every moment to put his eyes out with a pitchfork.

For some minutes nothing was to be gathered from the confusion of tongues, but at length it appeared that the parson having entered the long room of the Cock, pallid and breathless with the news that his young friend had been set upon and murdered by a gang of rascals on the road, the assembled company, all true men and lovers of sport, rose on the instant, harnessed their nags, and started for the scene of battle, resolved to fight it out fairly with the murderous crew.

Having contrived to extricate the parson from the crowd, Blase took him aside and said quickly in a low tone :

“Where is my father?”

“He follows. He was being lifted into a waggon with the other incapables when our cart started. Good lord! my young friend, what a night!”

“You have not mentioned my name?”

“No; or if I did the men were too drunk to notice it.”

“I do not wish it to be known. Be silent.”

At this moment a voice above the rest called :

“Do’e bring a light, zome’ne, vor I do think’s how squoire’s dead or suthin, bein’ I can’t get a word outen ’n nohows.”

Blase seized a candle, and pushing his way vigorously through the crowd of muddled rustics, got out into the air, and hastened to a waggon, where he presumed

his father must be, by hearing repeated cries of "Yoicks!" and "Tallyhow!" which he remembered had been used at table as an infallible means of arousing him.

A knot of three or four men were gathered behind the waggon. The tail-board was let down, and the butcher, bending down, was using his vocal efforts to send consciousness into the drunken head. Thrusting him aside, Blase held the candle forward. As the light fell upon the drunkard's face the butcher burst out laughing.

"Dang my bottons," cried he, "vor a zilly vule as I be! If I bean't been dingun tallyhow into the wrong 'n's ear. Haw! haw! haw! Whoy, it bean't the squoire at all, but Mäster Jenkuns the ratcatcher, and he's stöan deaf."

With a shiver of disgust Blase scanned the faces of the men who lay huddled together upon the straw at the bottom of

the waggon. He knew his father so little, that even the drunken fighting man was quicker than he to recognize his face.

“Theer he be, Lord love ’n. I knaws ’n by the zise of hes nose. Yoicks! your honour. Tallyhow!”

Sir Gilbert opened his eyes, and looked at the light in dull stupor.

“Theere hev been another vight, your worshup, twixt a gemman and a robber.”

“Back the winner vur vifty guineas,” murmured the baronet, and closed his eyes.

“And this is my father!” said Blase to himself, turning away. “This the representative of a race of gentlemen, the descendant of a man who earned his knighthood by noble deeds; a drunkard, and pigging in the same straw with rat-catchers and the scum of stable yards! If the name is to be saved from disgrace ’tis time that one of us gave up the life of debauchee.”

The noisy crowd slowly dispersed when it was at length made evident to them that the pleasing excitement of fighting was not to be enjoyed; but it was long before the last cart moved away, and the respectable frequenters of the Bag o' Nails settled down into their seats around the parlour chimney.

Mr. Tickel was the first to appreciate the blessings of peace and quiet. Ensconced in a warm corner, with his legs stretched out to catch the heat of the glowing embers, and gently crushing the sugar in a large glass of hot rum and water which he nursed tenderly upon his knees, he watched the departure of his protectors with that feeling of profound yet ungrateful satisfaction which a convalescent experiences in seeing the backs of the nurses and physicians who have attended him through his painful malady.

“Sir Gilbert again!” said the landlord,

as he closed the door and returned to his chair. "Sir Gilbert Godwin," he continued in explanation, addressing Blase; "a baronet of these parts who, instead of setting a good example to his tenants and neighbours, uses his influence only for to strengthen their vices and confirm 'em in their bad habits. There's nairy a riotous crew but the knight's at the head or the tail of it, which is a scandal to the county, and, as parson says, a thorn in the side of decent church-going folk."

"A mighty deal he cares for decent folks," said a parishioner, taking the pipe from his lips. "He'd as lief draw a badger or bait a bull Sundays as week-a-days."

"Ay, and liefer too!" said another speaker. "But what can you expect, seeing he's led and governed by a papist priest? I do believe this here Father Dominick encourages him in his wicked

ways to prevent his listening to parson's sarmons."

"I wish that may be his wust intent," said the landlord. "What say you, Muster Rudd?"

"Why, as to the matter o' that," replied Mr. Rudd, with an uneasy glance from Blase to Mr. Tickel, "there bean't no harm in wishing any man may be no wus 'an he seems."

This equivocal reflection was followed by a silence intimating that the company entertained suspicions which they did not care to openly express.

"As a stranger in this county, sir, and a clergyman of the Church of England," said Mr. Tickel, addressing the landlord, with a pompous air that commanded respect, and an effrontery which even astonished Blase, "may I ask what worse design you can attribute to the papist than that of precluding the unhappy

baronet from the beneficent teaching of our Church?"

The landlord inclined his head respectfully toward Mr. Tickel, drew a couple of long whiffs from his pipe, and then said in a low oracular tone :

"Some men be wus 'an they seem, and others seem wus 'an they be; and, as I say, if pigs was vallyed by the smell on 'em pork 'd be cheap; which is as much as to say as we don't ought to judge of this here Father Dominick by the unpleasant side of un; not but what the man as trustes hisself wi' a adder because some on 'em don't sting is a vule, as I say."

There was a little thin old gentleman—a bookseller by trade—in the corner opposite Mr. Tickel, who seemed, by the expression of his face during these two-sided observations, half inclined to be angry. He good humouredly suffered the general expression of approval which fol-

lowed the landlord's speech to subside, then he said in a clear highly-pitched voice, looking from Blase to the parson :

“ It is said here, gentlemen, that to be an enemy to Father Dominick is to be an enemy to one's self ; and this local proverb originated, I believe, with our excellent landlord, to whom we owe many such shrewd apophthegms.” The landlord accepted the compliment with becoming dignity. “ And truth to tell, many have suffered who have spoken their minds freely about him ; their sufferings in one or two instances, at least, being fairly attributable to the hand of this priest, and for that reason some of us dare not speak out before strangers. But, thank God, I owe no man a farthing, my position is independent, and having nothing greatly to repent, I have nothing greatly to fear from Father Dominick ; and so I will, if you choose, tell you all I know and

think concerning him, without demanding secrecy, but rather with the hope that you may help to publish facts which should bring the wicked ultimately to punishment."

The little gentleman took a pinch of snuff while Blase and Mr. Tickel thanked him for his confidence, and then proceeded to fulfil his promise.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LITTLE BOOKSELLER TELLS A STORY,
WHICH MUST NOT BE SKIPPED BY THE
READER, AND CONCLUDES WITH SOME
OBSERVATIONS NOT VERY FLATTERING
TO MR. TICKEL.

“I FEAR, gentlemen, my story will be rather long.” The bookseller looked at his watch. “But we are still early—it wants five minutes of nine—and I will endeavour to be brief. For you to comprehend this history fully, I must go back many years, to the time when I was a lad. Let me tell you that I am the same age to a day as this baronet, Sir Gilbert Godwin; and when he came of age, my father improved the occasion by bidding me take the young

man as my model, and for that reason, perhaps, I have watched his career with keen and painful interest. His personal gifts I could never hope to obtain, for he was a splendid specimen of a young Englishman, and excelled at all manly games. His mental accomplishments I hoped to rival; but his disposition, despite my father's eulogy, did not command my respect. He was generous to a fault. I had nothing wherewith to be profuse, and doubtless for that reason considered his free-handed liberality rather as a reckless indifference to the future, than the outcome of that generous spirit which sometimes restricts wastefulness. He seemed to me feeble, and wanting in manly decision, for even at the age of twenty-one these characteristics show themselves. However, this is not brevity. I will come to facts. At the age of twenty-two he came to the estate and title by the death of his father. The

next two years he spent in London, and plunged deeply into the pleasure of that wonderful city. I am speaking, sir, of thirty years ago, when there was even more license allowed to young men than at this time."

"Lor' deary heart, how things have changed!" observed the landlord.

"Satiated with such dissipations," the bookseller continued, "young Sir Gilbert returned to the Moat."

"Godwin's moat, 'tis called," said the landlord, in an undertone to Blase; "and if you are for staying in these parts a few days, 'twill well repay you to look at the house, which is prodigious old and curious."

"With him he brought a priest of his own age," continued the bookseller, "this very Father Dominick of whom we were speaking."

"The Godwins have been papists time out of mind"—this from the landlord in

a confidential whisper behind the back of his hand.

“My young gentleman had not been at home long, before he fell in love with the daughter of Captain Davenant, a sweet, pretty young lady, whose innocence and purity had possibly a double attraction for Sir Gilbert, by comparison with the affected coquettes he had met in London.”

“For’ard hussies !” murmured the landlord.

“Captain Davenant was a poor officer, who, having lost an arm at Quebec, had been forced to quit his Majesty’s service, and lived at Redwater, about twenty miles from this. The young baronet would marry Miss Davenant, despite her want of fortune, and the fact that her family were staunch protestants. Eager and impulsive, he would take no denial, and was willing to sign any agreement in order that he might obtain her—for I must

tell you Captain Davenant was opposed to the match. It was settled that the children of the marriage should be brought up according to the tenets of the English Church. After three months wooing he wedded her. It was a love match, and most people thought that the result could not fail to be a happy one."

"Ah! you can't make good cider of green apples, as I say," said the irrepressible landlord.

"Will you finish the history, landlord?" asked the bookseller.

"No, sir, not I. I leave it in better hands, and I humbly ask pardon for interrupting of you."

"In due course a child was born, a son, of whom I shall have to speak presently; and for a time it seemed as if the general belief was to be verified as to the happiness of this union. Father Dominick was frequently absent from Godwin's Moat

during the first eighteen months of Sir Gilbert's married life. Business connected with the Romish Church in London called him away; but at the end of this time Sir Gilbert undertook to transact this business, and leaving the priest at the Moat he himself went up to London. From that day his ruin began. The poor young wife was left in that isolated house with her child, her servants, and Father Dominick. Sir Gilbert spent most of his time in London, and his visits to the Moat became fewer and briefer. Then it was rumoured that he was living in infamy with an actress in an establishment near London. It is my belief that this report was secretly spread about by Father Dominick. Captain Davenant heard it, and finding by inquiry that it was true, he was for taking his daughter away from the Moat; but she refused, saying that it was her duty to stay there while God gave her strength

to support her misfortune. Poor soul, she had not long to suffer !”

“As I say, when you get to the bottom you can't sink no further,” whispered the landlord.

“One morning the news came to us that the baronet's lady was dead. She was murdered, sir. Mrs. Garston, the nurse of Master Blase, had helped undress her lady the night before. At four o'clock in the morning she, sleeping in the servants' wing, was awoke by the screaming of the poor lady, and the crying of the child who lay in the same bed with her ; the screaming continued whilst she struck a light, and then she heard the voice of Father Dominick calling, “Help ! help !”

“Ah ! help indeed, a villain !” muttered the landlord.

“When Mrs. Garston, with the other servants, reached their mistress's room they found her lying in the middle of the

room upon the floor, dead, and Father Dominick kneeling by her side supporting her head on his arm and holding a crucifix before her face. The bosom of her night-dress was stained with blood, and a long pointed dagger-knife lay by her side. The window opening over the moat was open. As soon as he could get away Father Dominick threw himself in the saddle and departed for London to find Sir Gilbert, albeit the morning had not then broken. At the same time the butler started off to fetch Captain Davenant from Redwater. There were then left in the house two maids and Mrs. Garston, with the child and the dead mother. The two girls ran terrified to their rooms, and as soon as it was light fled from the house and came half dead with terror to Rockford. Captain Davenant took the butler's horse—he had none of his own—and bidding him seek Mr. George, the captain's

brother, a doctor having a practice near Redwater, he galloped off to the Moat. There he found his murdered child, with Mrs. Garston alone in that grim house."

"She was a good body, and the fright aged her wonderful," said Mr. Tickel's neighbour, aside. "Nevertheless, she didn't die till last Christmas was a twelve-month, and Captain Davenant treated her like one of the family, he did."

"Soon afterwards the doctor arrived, but the poor lady, his niece, was past all mortal healing, and all he could do was to come down to Rockford to find the serving maids and send them back to the house. But they wouldn't return, and he could find no one who would go there. For thirty years ago, sir, the people here were in a barbarous state of ignorance and superstition, and when I tell you that no one dared to pass the churchyard at night you can understand that no one had

the courage to lie in a lonely house with a murdered lady, especially as Sunday after Sunday the parson had preached against popery, and told them of the evil doings of papists. Seeing, therefore, that he could get no one to perform the fitting offices there, Captain Davenant and his brother, with the aid of Mrs. Garston and the butler, carried the murdered lady in a carriage to Rockford."

"Ah! I mind what a fuss that made at the inquest;" said the landlord, "for you see, sir, Redwater lies in Devonshire, and Godwin's Moat stands in Dorsetshire."

"It was ten days before Father Dominick and Sir Gilbert appeared, for it seems the baronet was out a pleasuring at the moment of his wife's murder, and he could not be found for some days. His wife had been buried three days before his return. Meanwhile the sheriff of the county, and some gentlemen from the office

in Bow Street, London, had been making inquiries in every direction but the right one to find out who had done the murder. They could tell nothing but what every one knew; and the jury returned a verdict against some unknown person or persons. And there, so far as the law was concerned, the affair ended. But one of the maids, who at the inquest could not be got to open her mouth for yea or nay, said afterwards that when Father Dominick rose from holding the crucifix over the dead lady she noticed, despite that he held his head down, blood upon his throat, and it was then remembered that at the inquest he wore his throat covered, complaining of having taken a cold in it; and this girl further affirmed that her lady's finger-tips were stained."

"She had held the villain, I warrant, until his knife touched her heart," said one of the listeners.

“My father,” continued the little bookseller, “who took great interest in the affair until his last day, went over to Redwater and laid this information before Captain Davenant; but the captain, albeit he expressed his own belief in the guilt of Father Dominick, said it was now too late to use this evidence, which, even if it were trustworthy, would be insufficient to bring the priest to justice.”

“What became of the woman who gave this information?” asked Blase.

“She left Rockford the following week, and has not since been seen. Sir Gilbert appeared to be greatly shocked by this tragic event. He met Captain Davenant at the inquest and openly proclaimed his remorse for neglecting his wife. He readily accepted the proposal that his son should be kept under the care of Mrs. Davenant at Redwater. Then the Moat was shut up. But how sincere his con-

trition was you may judge when I tell you that at the end of two months he returned to Godwin's Moat with his priest, and the mistress whom in that short space of time he had rejoined and married. The woman must have obtained a most powerful hold upon his affections. This indecent haste set all the county families against him; and those who had been most inclined to forgive him, and extenuate his fault, became now his most bitter enemies. I cannot think that the baronet committed this outrage upon good taste of his own free will. I believe he was pressed to do it by the woman and the priest to whose interest it was that he should be cut off at once from society and thrown completely into their hands. In this purpose they succeeded perfectly. No one of his own standing visited him or received him; he was not permitted to join the hunts. Even the tradespeople and farmers of the

better sort avoided him. He was thus driven to find amusement in the society of the lowest classes. In a word, he ceased to be a gentleman."

"Is it possible," said Blase, "that a man could sink so quickly to such a depth of degradation?"

"Sir, from good to evil the descent is swift," replied the bookseller.

"Very true, sir; very true," observed Mr. Tickel.

"You must consider, sir," the bookseller said, addressing Blase, "that Sir Gilbert was still quite young, that his passions were stronger than his reason, that his character was possibly exceptionally ductile, and that he had fallen into the hands of a Jesuit, who, in the sacred name of religion, justified his errors, and forgave him his sins as fast as they were committed, and of a woman voluptuously beautiful, unscrupulous, selfish, and cunning. A young

man who makes himself the slave of his passion, and has not the strength to throw off the chains a subtle woman winds about him, is lost."

"That's gospel true!" exclaimed the landlord. "Look you at Master Colter, the blacksmith, a most masterful man, that could throw a quoit with any player in the county, to say nothing of his singing like a thrush from morn till night. Well, what has happened to him since he married old Smith's daughter? Why"—in a tone of deep commiseration—"he's j'ined the Methodies."

"I cannot imagine, sir," said Mr. Tickel to the bookseller, "what object the priest and his accomplice had in degrading the baronet."

"I hope to show you, sir. In six months from the death of the first wife a son was born to Sir Gilbert by the second. From the first this child was like neither Sir

Gilbert nor the mother; but as he grew the resemblance between him and Father Dominick became so marked that it was impossible to doubt the paternity."

"Like as two peas in a cod," put in the landlord.

"It was as if Providence had stamped the child to prove the parents' crime, and wean Sir Gilbert from his fatal infatuation. That warning, however, was lost upon him—either because by the time he came to note the likeness he was so stripped of self-respect as to be indifferent, or so sunk in uxorious slavery as to pardon the outrage rather than part with his wife. It is hardly possible that he could see the priest and his son side by side without detecting their resemblance."

The landlord took the pipe from his mouth as if about to confirm this view of the case, but the little bookseller, seeing his intention, withheld his pinch of snuff, and continued :

“Having ruined the baronet, the object of the priest—for I take him to be the leading character in this diabolical drama—was to ruin his son Blase. At the age of twelve the child was withdrawn from the guardianship of his grandparents at Redwater, and sent to a public school.”

“Ah, these public schools are the devil and all,” said the landlord.

“Possibly Captain Davenant would have refused to give up his grandson under a less plausible demand. Thus he was withdrawn from the control and gentle guidance of this excellent family. Nevertheless, he spent his holidays at Redwater, and for this simple reason—he would not abide at the Moat. Neither coaxing nor thrashing could keep him there. He hated his mother-in-law, his pretended half-brother, and the priest equally; and, young as he was, he must have held his weak father in contempt. The boy was never permitted to

leave the house alone when he could be prevented. His mother-in-law or Father Dominick accompanied him even in walking the grounds of Godwin's Moat. This surveillance galled Master Blase, for he was, I am told, a lad of high spirit and daring, and on the very first opportunity, he would escape and walk over to Redwater. Thrashings innumerable he got for this rebellion, but harsh treatment only made him hate the Moat and the people there more, and he would have risked his miserable life to escape the hated rule. We scarcely ever saw him in Rockford, for he disliked the company of Father Dominick and Mrs. Godwin too greatly to desire anything which compelled him to be in their society. For two years he continued to come home to the Moat at holiday times, to run away to Redwater, to be brought to the Moat and be thrashed, and to run away to Redwater again; then he gave

Father Dominick warning that he would take no more thrashing from him, and soon after proved his words by knocking him down with a chair when the priest attempted to strike him ! ”

“ Bravo, boy ! ” say I, exclaimed the landlord.

“ That put an end to his visits at Godwin’s Moat. Thenceforth he spent term and vacation at school. But Captain Davenant took apartments hard by during the holidays, and had the lad with his family whenever it was possible. Well, gentlemen, Master Blase was kept at this school until the age of twenty ; then a surer blow was struck at his welfare. He was suddenly removed from all restriction—and I believe restriction of some kind was necessary, the young fellow being wild and reckless—and sent out into the world with full liberty to do what he liked and spend what he would. I cannot conceive

a more devilish device for ruining him than that. It was worse than any previous cruelty to give a lad of his temperament unbounded liberty; and the result proves how well the effect of it had been gauged. Eight years ago he was sent away, and from that time to this he has never been seen here or at Redwater. What has become of him?"

"Murdered, *I* should say," remarked the landlord.

"No, sir, he has simply gone to ruin. He is in London, a profligate and a penniless wretch. As I learn from the attorney who has furnished me with many of these particulars, Sir Gilbert divided his disposable property into four equal parts. Three parts he has bestowed by will upon Father Dominick, his wife, and Eugenius, the bastard son of his wife; the fourth he has given to his son Blase. This portion being spent, the baronet refuses to give him any

more, and has told him to expect nothing but the acres and title which must become his at the baronet's death. Long before that time—mark my words—every tree on the estate will be felled, every farm be allowed to fall into a waste, and every penny raised by confiscation or saved by neglect of the estate, will be in the pockets of the priest and his family. Now, gentlemen, you see the motive of this false papist for contriving the ruin of Sir Gilbert and his son.”

“Let us hope,” said Blase, “that the profligate son may see his folly and reform.”

“I respond to that wish with all my heart. But, sir, how can that be expected? The young fellow has already so far lost his self-respect as to avoid the very means of reformation. Although he has returned from continental travel three years, he has not been near his good friends at Redwater.

That is nothing less than base ingratitude ; though I own that shame may well account for his avoiding them. I do not wish to judge him uncharitably. He deserves our compassion. That he should run into extravagance is only natural."

"You are in the right, sir," said Mr. Tickel.

"Youth is the season for indulgence."

"Very true, sir," said Mr. Tickel—he did not yet regard himself as being beyond that season.

"Our age, although a vast improvement upon the past, still gives great latitude to young men, and they are scarcely to be blamed if they accept what is natural to them."

As the little man paused to refresh himself with a pinch of snuff, the parson said in a widely audible whisper to his neighbour : "A very exact, discerning, and just gentleman, this !"

“And, as I have said,” added the bookseller, “a surer method of sending him to destruction than that employed by this priest, man or Satan never devised. For not only was he freed from restriction and given unbounded liberty and means, but a man was selected to serve as his governor who deserves to be whipped at the cart’s tail and exposed in the public pillory. This man, originally a parson as I learn, was unfrocked for drunkenness and profligacy, and fled his parish to escape the prison.”

“There’s a fellow for you,” said the landlord.

“A man steeped in vice, without one particle of principle, and with scarcely sufficient wit to conceal his sins under the cloak of sanctity.”

“Hang such rascals, say I,” cried the landlord; “I would I could lay my hand on him. He should see the bottom of my horse-pond, I warrant you!”

“Even parsons are subject to the same natural laws that govern mankind,” said Mr. Tickel faintly, “and the excuse you have made for the young gentleman he accompanied, might be urged in his extenuation.”

“What, youth, sir? Why the fellow was forty or forty-five, as I am given to understand. The very accumulation of his sins should have made him conscious of his age, and directed his thoughts rather to the grave than the indulgence of his sensual appetites. With Mr. Godwin 'tis different. He has all excuses in his favour, and I pray God to deliver him from evil and lead him to grace. But now, gentlemen, I see by my watch I have overstayed my customary hour; so I will beg you to excuse me.”

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN DAVENANT.

WITH the little bookseller's departure there was a general movement to the door, Blase and Mr. Tickel alone remaining before the fire.

"Here's a revelation, my young friend," said the parson in a low tone, taking the chair beside Blase. "it puts the game in our own hands: we have the knight, your father, under our thumb, as it were. But did you ever know such a scurrilous, venomous little wretch as he who told the story? One would say that he knew you, Blase."

"'Tis more than possible he guessed who

you were, parson ; and before the same idea strikes the landlord, it will be well for you to get to bed."

"I am drowsy, lad. But tut, tut! A penniless profligate—there was a thing to say of you ; as for what he said of me I do not value it of a straw. 'Tis a trifle. Let the world, that judges by externals, condemn poor old Tickel as it will, so that you see beneath the surface and know the gold that lies here"—the parson smote his breast—"I am content."

"'Tis another fault to my account that I do not hate you. Go to bed, parson."

"We will say no more, Blase. Good night—though I shan't sleep for thinking of those cruel words—a penniless profligate! Well, well!"

With these expressions of commiseration Mr. Tickel left the room, and avoiding the landlord, who was standing on the threshold in conversation with a departing

guest, he sneaked up to the bed chamber, where he had prudently seen a fire lit before settling down in the parlour.

Blase was about to follow, for he had no desire to have the conversation reopened by the landlord, when John Hutchins, who had been permitted to rest himself at the further end of the room, rose from his chair, and approaching him said :

“ I trust, sir, you are convinced of the truth of my story, and do not regret the mercy you have shewn to an unfortunate wretch driven to desperation by the villainy of that man whose character has been presented to you this evening by an impartial judge.”

“ You have my sympathy,” said Blase in a gentle voice, “ and if this,” slipping a note into the man’s hand, “ will help you through your present straits and lead to better fortune, ’tis no more than I desire.”

“ Wait—wait I beg you, sir,” exclaimed

Hutchins, catching at Blase's coat-sleeve as he was moving away. "You must wait to hear my thanks—poor as my words may be. I—I—no—'tis useless, I cannot find one word to speak; my heart——"

"You have said enough," said Blase. "You may have stronger claims upon my sympathy than you imagine."

These words spoken carelessly were full of meaning for Hutchins.

"Is it, then, true, sir," he said eagerly, "—the suspicion that flashed upon me when I saw the stout gentleman who said he was a clergyman speaking to you just now, that *you* are the son of Sir Gilbert Godwin?"

"I am!"

"Then, sir, you have as much reason as I to curse Father Dominick."

"You have heard my character from an impartial judge," Blase said, smiling.

"I do not allude to your character, sir.

I hold here in my hand a proof of your virtue that no words can refute. But the loss of your fortune, your alienation from your father, his disgrace, and possibly the murder of your mother—these are calamities which that priest must answer for.”

Blase was silent. He saw the necessity of keeping cool in encountering such a foe as Father Dominick.

“Heavens, sir, you will avenge these wrongs!” cried Hutchins, taking the set expression in the face of Blase to imply apathy.

“Please God,” Blase answered.

“You can at least expose the intimacy that existed between the priest and Harriet at the very moment when Sir Gilbert was making love to her. Take me as your witness, sir.”

“That will serve no purpose. My father must have discovered that such a liaison had existed by the resemblance between Euge-

nus and the priest, which has been spoken of to-night. We must be careful what we do—you especially. He may have the power to throw you into prison for the unpaid debt of your poor wife."

"That may be so, indeed," said Hutchins, his courage dropping in the moment.

"Here comes the landlord," said Blase. "Keep what you know a secret and—wait. I will see you to-morrow."

Blase went to his bed-chamber. In the passage a placid and regular snoring fell upon his ear. Looking on the floor by the door of the room from which this sound of repose issued he saw a pair of shoes—shoes of the best leather, square-toed, large, and with comfortable hollows for tender parts—there was no mistaking them, or the sleeping wearer. They belonged to the parson, and he slept, despite his sins, for he was blessed with an elastic conscience upon which the

heaviest blow might fall without leaving the slightest impression.

Not so was it with Blase. He did not fairly sleep at all that night. He tried to think collectedly : he tried to not think at all, and between these impatient endeavours his thoughts may have become more vague and incoherent, but they never ceased to hover about one subject. That subject, strangely enough, was not his meeting with Sir Gilbert, the attack upon the road, nor even those remote yet striking incidents of the past which had been revealed to him so freshly, but simply his own ingratitude, heartlessness, want of feeling, or whatever the fault was which had caused him first to forget, then to neglect, and finally to avoid, the only people in the world who loved him. Their familiar faces haunted him. He saw them all as he had seen them in the old better days when he had escaped from the tyranny

of Father Dominick and sought an asylum at Redwater—his grandfather tall and erect, his grandmother with her mob-cap, her old-fashioned roan dress and black mittens, and aunt Gertrude with that sweet sadness on her face, which in a pretty old maid tells of early loss.

With the first sounds of movement in the house Blase put an end to these regretful memories by springing from his bed. He had decided which duty must be first done. He rang the bell, and when the astonished waiter came to his door he bade him prepare breakfast and get ready a chaise at once. He could but just see to dress himself by the feeble grey light, the clock below was striking six as he left his room. Outside the parson's door he paused, and knocked once—twice—thrice, but still the sleeper snored with unaltered regularity.

“I wager the old rascal will have the

impudence to tell me that he has not closed an eye all night," said Blase to himself as he gave up the attempt to wake him and ran downstairs.

The landlord was also a comfortable sleeper, and entrusted the early management of his house to his wife, a notable good woman, who concerned herself chiefly in the affairs of her kitchen; so Blase took his breakfast alone and made a hearty meal.

For the feeling that he was about to amend his ways and begin a new and better era in his life invigorated him in mind and in body and gave him a zest for life which had for some time been sadly wanting.

So eager was he to carry out his good intentions, that he laid aside his knife the moment the chaise was brought to the door, and took his seat without delay.

But as he was sitting there pulling on

his gloves, while the boy who was to drive him buttoned up the apron, his eye was attracted to a bedroom window by the flutter of a curtain, and there he saw a girl's face peeping over the curtains which she held gathered up under her chin; whereupon the young libertine's blood began to dance in his veins and he lost sight of every good resolution that had occurred to him since the moment he vowed to reform.

The girl had clearly arranged the curtain thus that she might have a good look at the handsome gentleman in the chaise; and this desire she seemed resolved to gratify even when she found herself observed.

She was pretty, although somewhat pale and thin; she had a small white nose and a pair of roguish black eyes; and these pretty eyes blinked as Blase looked up at them, just as if a ray of sunlight

had fallen into them. As the chaise moved on Blase turned his head to look back at the girl, and she bringing her face closer to the window turned her eyes to follow him while the prettiest smile just parted her lips. For ten minutes after Blase could think of nothing but that girl's face ; which shows how difficult it is for a man with the best of intentions to lay aside his loose habits.

A mile from Rockford the road is struck by the footpath from Godwin's Moat and from this point was familiar to Blase ; there was scarcely a distinctive feature which did not recall some incident of his boyhood and of his flights from home—the brook at which he used to drink, the places where he rested, the wood in which he hid one day when he fancied himself pursued—these and many such spots filled his mind with reminiscences which occupied his thoughts until the little village

of Rickham came in sight, with the great cedar towering over the chestnuts of Red-water beyond.

He stopped at the ale-house in Rickham, and bidding the boy await his return, walked through the village and approached the old house which had been more to him than home, with feelings that seemed but a repetition of those he had experienced so long ago. He remembered to have felt the same choking feeling in his throat, the same misty tears before his eyes, the same yearning for love and sympathy, and the same dread that the old kind faces might look upon him sternly.

Was anything altered? not to the eye. There were the great gates thrown back—partly to tell the world that Captain Davenant was at home and open to receive company, partly to save the servant the trouble of walking down from the house to answer applications; there at the end

of the broad chestnut avenue was the old red brick house, the well-polished panes of the bay windows glittering in the golden light of the sun just peeping over Rickham wood; and there was the bent old villager sweeping with slow and careful movement the fallen leaves into little mounds by the side of the drive.

“Marn’ng, sir, marn’ng,” said the old man, stopping to take off his hat to the early visitor.

“Is Captain Davenant risen?” Blase inquired.

“Ees, zur. Theere he be, oop away by the zedar-tree, a taking of hes marn’ng walk.”

Looking across the lawn, Blase perceived his grandfather; and with his heart beating quicker he hastened his steps to overtake the old gentleman. When he was within a dozen paces the captain caught the sound of his footstep, halted,

and turned about. He had aged since Blase last saw him. He was less erect, his complexion was whiter, the wrinkles in the angles of his eyes deeper. He put up his glass as the young man approached, and then let it fall, as Blase came to a stand before him and dropped his chin upon his breast in silence.

“Mr. Godwin—Blase—my boy!” he exclaimed, his voice falling to a quavering murmur upon the last word; then drawing himself up and controlling his emotion by an effort: “May I ask,” he said, “what has brought you here?”

“I have come to ask your forgiveness,” said Blase humbly.

“Why, sir, one would think it is not required by the length of time that has passed since you first offended. Don’t mistake this agitation for a weak and misplaced tenderness towards you, sir. ’Tis passion, sir, ’tis choler. When a

man forgets the women who love him; when he suffers fond hearts to yearn and despair without one effort to soothe them; nay, when he values not the tenderest affection at the cost of a sheet of paper with a kind word written upon it, he has more claim to punishment than pardon, for he not only ceases to be kind, but becomes cruel. I am angry, sir; I have a right to be angry; I ought to be angry. 'Tis well I have steeled my heart against you, sir. or it might ache even now when you are here to excite my indignation, to think of all I have thought and suffered on your account during eight long years—or at least part of that time. Thank God, I am not a woman. Happily for me a soldier's heart gets toughened early, and gives no hold to the roots and fibres of a clinging love. . . . Good God, Blase! what are you doing—crying? Why, there, there; put your arms about

my neck, boy. Embrace me, dear, dear lad."

Indeed, tears of repentance had sprung from the young man's heart, and flowed down his face; and thus was he forgiven.

"Come, my boy, we will go within doors," said Captain Davenant when he could again speak. "I have done my duty, which was to upbraid you, and now 'tis but a common act of Christianity to forgive. Do not let the remembrance of my harsh words hurt you."

"'Tis your tenderness that wounds me, sir."

"Well, well, 'tis a sign that your heart is yet good. But I promise you I shall be severe by-and-bye. I shall demand a very thorough explanation after breakfast. As you know, boy, I can be firm and stern when circumstances require. You must be hungry, Blase. Where have you come from this morning?"

“Rockford, sir.”

“Gad’s my life! How often about this very hour have you come hither covered with the dust of that road, poor boy! And now you are a man, and, by George, a devilish good-looking sort of a fellow, too. You’ve a fine deep chest, and as good a pair of shoulders as ever I’ve seen. But you don’t look happy, Blase—you don’t look happy.”

“How should I, sir, having to face the women who have loved me in vain? I dread my grandmother’s tears.”

Captain Davenant dropped his head, and then said in a low voice—

“The last is shed, my boy. Here you will see neither her smile nor tears again.”

“How, sir?” Blase said under his breath.

“She has been dead two years.”

Blase dared not trust himself to speak.

“She spoke of you almost at the last,

poor soul," continued Captain Davenant. " 'Tell my dear Blase when he comes,' said she, 'that I wished him farewell, and may God bless him.' She left a trinket for your chain. I have kept it in a drawer of my desk for you."

"I am punished," said Blase in choking tones; then presently he asked, trembling. "and Aunt Gertrude?"

"She has been spared to me; otherwise I think you would have found this old house closed, for I could not have lived alone."

CHAPTER VIII.

AUNT GERTRUDE.

“TWILL be well,” said Captain Davenant, “to prepare Gertrude for the meeting; so, while I go up to speak to her—for I see by her closed window that she has not yet left her room—do you go into my closet and wait there.”

Blase passed through the hall and entered the little room where Captain Davenant spent his hours of retirement. In his boyhood he had always considered it a great privilege to pass an hour in this apartment, for here he could gratify, if not satiate, the appetite which he in common with most robust boys had for heroics.

On two sides of the room were shelves filled with books relating to the use of arms and the art of warfare; many of them were illustrated. Two books were a joy to study and a pain to quit. One was a treatise on fortifications, fully a hundred years old, with graphic pictures in which the course of each particular shell was traced through the sky to the bomb from which it was discharged, and the disastrous result measured in heads, limbs, and bricks scattered around. The other was a more modern work upon the duel, with admirable outline drawings of successful hits, showing the combatants at the decisive moment of their battle, and sparing no detail. Besides these thrilling works there was a collection of weapons which had belonged to Davenants now dead and gone, and been used by them in good and loyal fight. There were stains upon them which *might* be of rust, but

which the boy fervently hoped were of blood. There also, below these trophies, was Captain Davenant's sword which he had fought with at Quebec. There was no mistake about that having killed somebody. When the boy was permitted to take it from the scabbard he would do so with as much care as if it were glass, and his eyes would grow round with eager speculation as they dwelt upon a notch in the blade. With regard to this notch Captain Davenant had one day ventured to suppose that he must have struck a bayonet with it, whereupon Blase, shaking his head, replied solemnly, "Bone, *I* should say, grandfather."

These things had now no interest for him; they failed even to recall the old sensations to his mind. He could think only of the woman whose affection had outlived his neglect. With hung head he paced from end to end of the room until the sound of voices reached his ear, then

he stood trembling and weak as a girl. Footsteps pattered quickly over the tiled hall, the door opened, and then, with a little fluttering inarticulate cry of joy, Aunt Gertrude ran across the room and fell into his arms.

She was a little lady—Blase had to bend his head to kiss hers as it lay against his breast — with a sweet fair English face, and pretty white hands, plump and dimpled at the knuckles. Her hair was quite white, and contrasted oddly with her face, which was still that of a young woman. It was said that her hair was grey when she returned from Italy, where her betrothed husband died in her arms. A casual observer would not have dreamt that she had suffered so cruelly. Her disposition was lively rather than morbid; she was less sentimental even than most women. She sought constantly to find a fair side to dark things, and did her best

to ameliorate the hardships of life by endeavouring to overcome them. She had pretty dark eyes, and arch winning ways ; and the goodness of her heart was a proverb in the country round about Redwater. To many it was a matter of surprise that she did not marry, for it was known that she had refused several good offers of marriage. But those who knew how tenaciously natures like hers cling to their first ideals, how deeply she loved her father, how still more intense was the love bestowed upon her dead lover, saw that it was merely consistent fidelity which kept her an old maid. Perhaps the matrimonial troubles and awful end of her sister Grace, which occurred about the time of her lover's death, strengthened her subsequent antipathy to marriage. She had loved Blase from the first with a maternal fondness. Pity for the motherless child, tender love for Grace, his unhappy mother,

and possibly those yearning dreams of offspring which had come to her mind in the earlier days of her betrothal, all combined to make him dear to her.

She shed a few womanly tears as she lay against his heart, then brushing them away resolutely she stood back a little, and with her eyes yet moist looked at him in pride and joy.

“How you have grown, dear!” she cried. “What a fine handsome man you are.”

“I wish I had better reason to be vain,” Blase replied. “’Tis all the worse to have a manly face and an unmanly heart.”

“Who but you dare tell me that your heart is unmanly? You have come back to us. Oh! I knew you would come again, only the time has seemed long to us.” A shade of sadness passed over her face as she thought of the long months and years of suspense and doubt, and then she

went back to his arms, nestling her face against his breast again, and smiled.

“I have been possessed, I think,” said Blase; “and, like an opium eater, I have forgotten everything, cared for nothing but my own enjoyment. Then when I began to awake from this stupor I was ashamed and dared not face you—thinking it better that you should believe me to be dead than know me to be ungrateful.”

“’Tis as you say, dear, pleasure is a narcotic to the young. Men are not tame things to fawn about those who have reared them, to stay within narrow limits, to obey the wishes of others—they will be free. And you could never brook constraint. ’Twas that drove you to an opposite extreme. Oh! you are a young lion, dear?”

“And still a brute.”

“Say that you have your faults, they are faults of youth and manhood. I would

not have you less a man to be an angel. And there is enough said. Now lead me in to breakfast. Let me hold your arm, so. Oh! what a mite I seem!" she looked up at him sidelong. "You shall take me to church to-morrow, and may Heaven pardon me if I be puffed up with pride."

Blase led Aunt Gertrude into the dining-room—a beautiful old room with a deep bay window at the end in which the Davenant coat, crest, supporters and motto were displayed in coloured glass. The breakfast cloth was laid on one end of the long table which, with the panelled wainscot, and the floor, were of dark oak, polished as bright as beeswax and patient labour could make them.

Captain Davenant sat in the embrasure of one of the side windows reading Milton in order to compose his mind; he rose as the door opened, and after a few kind words

led the way to the breakfast table with as much ceremony as if he were a prince leading his company to a banquet.

Aunt Gertrude would fain have sat close beside Blase, that she might more readily minister to his wants, but etiquette compelled her to take the seat opposite to him, and on the right of Captain Davenant, who took the head of the board, whence, however, she had the advantage of being better able to see Blase.

A feeling of constraint must undoubtedly have oppressed Blase during the meal, but for the tact of Aunt Gertrude, who contrived to find subject for continued conversation which bore no reference to the past, and was interesting alike to him and Captain Davenant; so that while the talk wandered from London fashions to the victory over the Dutch fleet, and the prospects of the cider yield, Blase came to feel himself at home once more, and found

himself sufficiently at ease to take part in the conversation, and at the same time follow out an under current of silent observation and reflection. He noticed that the coat his grandfather wore was threadbare in parts and faded, like the coverings of the chairs, to a pale neutral tint; that the table-cloth was darned at the corners, and in those parts where it had worn thin by long usage; that the old man who served the chocolate on a silver salver, was the same old man he had seen sweeping the drive, but now rendered painfully ludicrous by a Rammilies wig and a livery which probably his predecessors had worn from the commencement of the century, and which hung upon his shoulders in large folds, the skirt nearly touching his heels, and the cuffs falling over his knuckles. He perceived also that the chocolate was wofully thin; that the rashers of bacon were ridiculously out of

proportion with the large silver dish on which they were served; and that his aunt and grandfather took the slightest modicum of butter with their bread. These facts were trifles, but the deduction to be drawn from them was that Captain Davenant was extremely poor, and this it was important to Blase to know. It was a discovery to him. For although these signs of poverty were of old standing—the antiquated livery, the worn clothing, the mended linen were familiar to him—they had not borne the significance to his boyish intelligence which they carried now to his more comprehensive understanding.

Captain Davenant had too much dignity to make his limited means the subject of comment. He had never done a mean action nor entertained a mean thought in his life; he was ashamed of nothing; he feared no man. In the old days he had tipped Blase magnificently. He had not

the slightest hesitation in begging the Duke of Rockingham to eat bread and cheese with him when his grace did him the honour to call at Rockford one day at lunch time. He made no pretence to riches, nor any attempt to conceal his position. When visitors came they were treated alike, no matter what their rank or position, to the best he had, and that was all that the richest or most generous of men could do. He owed no man a farthing, and his estate was in such condition that if he died at any moment his heirs would find it as he had received it. Not a tree had been felled, not an ounce of silver melted, not a foot of ground mortgaged; the house was in good repair, the grounds in decent order. He lived frugally, and to the extent of his means he gave to the poor. In a word, and to sum up all, he did his duty in the manner which he conceived was consistent

with the character of a soldier and a gentleman.

“Will you have your old room, Blase dear?” Aunt Gertrude asked when breakfast was ended, and her father made a movement to leave the table.

“That must depend, my dear,” interposed the old gentleman. “Blase will give me a few minutes in my closet before deciding that question. Shall it be now, sir?”

“I am at your service, sir,” Blase replied.

Aunt Gertrude looked at Blase in silent compassion, then her eyes turned in supplication to her father, as if begging him to be merciful. But Captain Davenant, with the serious business of this interview before him, could take no notice of sentimental appeals against justice; he made his daughter a stately bow and led the way out of the room. Blase followed. Quickly

and stealthily Aunt Gertrude whipped round the end of the table, and overtaking Blase by the door she, with the ardour of a young sweetheart rather than the coldness of an old maiden aunt, caught his hand in hers and pressed a silent kiss upon his cheek.

“I don’t think papa can be very cruel to you, dear,” she whispered.

CHAPTER IX.

OF THE GRAVE DISCUSSION WHICH TOOK
PLACE IN CAPTAIN DAVENANT'S CLOSET.

"I AM conscious that I was over hasty in giving you my pardon, Blase," said Captain Davenant when they were together in his closet. "I was led away by my feelings, and in forgiving you your neglect of me I overlooked the possibility of your having committed offences which it would be less easy to pardon. Therefore, sir, before asking you to stay at Redwater, I must beg you to tell me if, in the pursuit of your pleasures, you have done anything which should exclude you from my house."

"I have lived a loose and profligate life," Blase said, the blood suffusing his face and neck.

“The manners of this age and the laws of private society justify, if they do not even encourage, such faults. I do not wish to know what follies you have committed. Only tell me, in one word, my boy, that you have not been guilty of—of—of—Confound it, sir, you know what I mean!”

“Indeed I do not, sir.”

“Guilty of—my tongue refuses to hint such a thing to my grandson; but, in fact, Blase, one of those busybodies, who are never content unless they be meddling in other people’s business and setting friends by the ears, brought me word—and near enough it was of coming to your aunt’s ears—that you were to be seen any night at Brooke’s or White’s——”

“I have played, and lost, and paid. Great heavens, grandfather, you don’t think I would cheat?”

“Not I, my boy. Give me your hand. Thank God, that’s all over! I told you

I should be severe, but I had to screw my courage up to this, I assure you.. Honourable play is a good thing. Gerty and I play cribbage for twopence a game every night of our lives, except Sundays. And as for the other follies—hard drinking and gallantry—well, well, the less said about them the better. Phew! how warm this has made me. Thank Heaven it's all over, again say I. Ah! if you knew how it makes my old heart swell—here, Blase, here—to see you again sitting in this old room, you young rascal!” His voice trembled and broke; then he gathered courage, and in firmer though yet shaky tones he said, “There, there; 'tis nothing. Bring your chair closer, boy. See, there are the two books you loved to look at. I've kept 'em in the same place all these years, and last Christmas I took 'em down to look at; but Lord! their charm was gone. Will you have one of 'em down

now? ‘Monk on the small-sword,’ that you coloured so well, though, to my thinking, you put too much red in the designs considering what a little blood flows from such wounds; nevertheless, they were capitally done. Shall it be ‘Monk,’ or will you have ‘Bailey’s fortifications’?”

“I think I will defer that pleasure, sir, for there is a subject which weighs heavy on my mind just now, and upon which I wish to talk with you.”

“No confession I hope, my boy.”

“No, sir. ’Tis not now the subject of my own faults, but of the crime that deprived me of a parent who might have saved me from them.”

The expression of childish gaiety that had irradiated the old officer’s face left it suddenly, and he said quickly—

“What loss do you mean?”

“The loss of my mother.”

“What do you know of her?”

“That she was murdered.”

“Was it this brought you from London?”

“No; I knew nothing of it until I came to Rockford last night. I left London to ask my father's forgiveness and yours. If the history I heard is true, my father stands in greater need of forgiveness than I. Grandfather, I want you to tell me what you know.”

Captain Davenant looked at Blase steadily for some moments without speaking. He seemed to be gauging the strength of his grandson's character, to be weighing the advisability of complying with his request. Finally he said :

“My boy, I am sorry that you know so much. I would have spared you the pain of this useless knowledge. In a quarter of a century the recollection of this family disgrace should have died, one thinks. That was my hope. But for some people these unhappy matters have

a lasting interest, and they fondly believe that they are forwarding the ends of justice by their incessant tattle. They are like the old woman whose hands I had the misfortune to fall into after Quebec. She fancied if she could find the ball in my shattered arm I should recover, to her lasting glory, and so she probed and probed my poor arm, giving me infernal tortures, until the surgeon came and took it off. Into the company of such a person you have fallen, I expect. There is such an one at Rockford I know, to my cost. However, Blase, you are no longer a boy; and although I would still keep you in ignorance, I cannot refuse to answer the questions you think it right to ask."

"I understand your reluctance to make the disgrace of our family subject for vulgar curiosity, grandfather. I will ask you only one question: Do you know if any evidence exists which could bring

Father Dominick before a judge for the murder of my mother ? ”

“ No, Blase, I do not,” answered Captain Davenant.

Blase sighed. “ I thought my mother’s woman, Mrs. Garston, or uncle George, might have discovered some fact to prove his guilt.”

“ Both are dead.”

“ Then I have no further questions to put,” said Blase. “ Still I believe I have sufficient presumptive evidence to crush that villain ! ”

“ Heavens ! my boy, you do not think of going to law ? ” cried Captain Davenant in alarm.

“ No, sir ; my sole object is to save my father, to make him see if possible the villainy of those wretches who killed my mother, and brought disgrace upon our family.”

“ Pardon me, my boy. I forget that Sir Gilbert is your father. Your consideration

for him who has shown so little kindness to you does you honour. Twenty-five years of bitter regret that he was ever born have made me cease to think of him with common charity. 'Tis your duty to attempt to reclaim him, though"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I fear he has grown too callous and too brutal for any effort of yours to be effectual. With no sense of shame, no feeling of self-respect or affection, what threat or entreaty can move him to cast off the creatures who, by alienating him from the world, have made themselves necessary to his existence?"

"I must do my best."

"You must," said Captain Davenant; and then, after a pause, "I would I could help you, but 'tis not in my power. You spoke of proofs, Blase; what proofs have you?"

"By a curious accident I fell into conversation with a man upon the road to Rockford last night, who was bent on a

mad project of revenging the injuries he had received from Father Dominick. This unhappy man, whose name is John Hutchins, is the brother-in-law of my father's second wife. He knows that she was the mistress of Father Dominick at the very time that she married my father. To prevent the betrayal of this secret, the priest contrived to have him impressed and carried to sea, at the same time throwing his wife—the sister of the woman my father espoused—into the Fleet prison for debt. When John Hutchins' term of five years was expired, he returned to London, to find his wife dead, with one mourner—her child. By an unfortunate accident Hutchins lost his money on the very day he received it from the pay office. These troubles for a time seem to have bereft him of reason, and with his child he left London to walk to Godwin's Moat, and revenge himself upon Father Dominick."

“Unhappy wretch ! Where is he now, Blase ? ”

“ I left him at the inn, at Rockford.”

“ We will send for him, my boy, this very day ; for though I would fain hear that the villain who injured him is dead, I would not that this poor fellow added to his misfortunes by committing an act of violence in his desperation. As for his proofs, I see not what good they can serve you.”

“ I will show you. Soon after we reached the inn at Rockford, where I stayed the night, a cavalcade composed of stable-helps and such riff-raff stopped at the inn. They had with them Sir Gilbert Godwin. He lay in the bottom of the waggon too drunk to get out of it, with others in the same condition. When they were gone a respectable company of men, sitting in the parlour, fell to talking upon Sir Gilbert, and one more intelligent than the rest, not knowing who I was, told me the history of my father.”

“ ’Tis a little man, with sharp eyes.”

“ He is, sir.”

“ I know him, and have had to forbid him my house. ’Tis the man I likened to the old woman who probed my wound. Well, lad ? ”

“ One part of his story seemed to me to furnish strong presumptive evidence of Father Dominick being the murderer of my mother, and that was the fact that my father’s wife gave birth to a son soon after her marriage, who, by the faithful likeness he bears to Father Dominick, proves his paternity.”

“ Except that it swells the mass of shame and disgrace, what does that fact do ? ”

“ It proves the motive which is wanted to explain why my mother was murdered. It was to provide a home and a fortune for the priest’s son, and to silence the tongue of his mistress, who otherwise might have betrayed him to my father that my mother was killed.”

Captain Davenant took a turn up and down the room, while he reflected upon the matter in silence, and then pausing before Blase, he said :

“ My boy, I do not wish to discourage you in your laudable desire to free your father from the dominion of these evil people. I hope with all my heart you may succeed ; but I would warn you from relying too strongly on the effect this evidence will have upon your father, lest its failure might disappoint you unduly. The busybody who told you this, has drawn the same conclusions as you, and shown them to me as an inducement for me to accept his assistance. It seemed to me then, as it seems now, a weak reed to rest on. For surely this resemblance between son and father—I do not doubt for a moment Father Dominick’s culpability—must have struck your father, and forced him to form a tolerably just estimate

of the virtue of these people. And if a man can tamely brook such a palpable offence against him, believe me he will not be greatly aroused by the refutable charge of injury against a woman whom he long since ceased to love.”

Blase could make no response.

“Great God!” ejaculated the captain, as he again paced the little room, “is it possible that any of Thy creatures can be so insensible to Thine awful justice, that even at the close of life they are not moved to repentance! Think, my boy, what this man must have had before his eyes these five and twenty years—the recollection of a young and beautiful woman still bearing her first infant in her arms, whose life he took. When his guilt first appeared to me, I said to my brother George, who would have had me take the law against him, “Let him go. His sin is too great for the lenient punishment of our laws.

Heaven will avenge the wrong he has done, and through his own conscience mete out a retribution more just to his offence. Yet, lo! twenty-five years have passed, and for all we know he suffers not one pang; nay, so little is he touched with remorse, that he perpetrates sin on sin, crime on crime, as is shown by the history of this poor fellow, John Hutchins."

"There is the reason, sir, for my endeavour to overthrow him. By George! might not one take such a rascal by the throat and squeeze the life from him as from a venomous adder!"

"Govern the impulse, Blase. All may be lost and nothing gained by violence. You will not attempt this task to-day. Do not, I beg of you. Stay with me and think it coolly over, and go when you feel that you are master of yourself, for then only can you be master of such a man as that."

"I will abide by your counsel, sir. A

day's delay can make but little difference to my father ; and I do not think I could stand just now in the presence of that villainous priest with folded hands."

"Good, very good, my boy," said Captain Davenant, with a sigh of relief. Then his countenance brightening with the transition of his thoughts to a pleasanter subject, he added, "We will send over to Rockford at once for John Hutchins and his child. Aunt Gerty will be mad with joy, having you in the house and a couple of unfortunate folks to befriend. She won't be able to play a sober game at cribbage for a month. 'Tis wonderful how that good soul's feelings rule her play. I have known her to overlook a flush of five on account of a lying-in ; and Christmas time plays the deuce with her arithmetic, so that she will peg herself seven when she shows three fifteens and six by pairs. Well, well, could we play cribbage at all times without mis-

takes, there would be little joy or care in the world. Bailey shall borrow a cart in the village, and go fetch the poor souls."

"As for that, sir, I came over in a chaise, which is put up at the ale-house. But—there's a little difficulty ——"

"Out with it," my boy.

"You must know, sir, that I have a kind of half servant, half companion, who accompanies me; a churchman, and he also is at Rockford."

"A churchman—why he shall be welcome, be sure. There's nothing I like better after dinner than a good stiff theological discussion."

"And there's nothing," thought Blase, "that the parson likes better after dinner than a good stiff glass of gin and water and light conversation."

CHAPTER X.

MR. TICKEL TAKES SUPPER AT REDWATER
HOUSE.

BLASE wrote a short note to Mr. Tickel, bidding him dine at the inn—it was now past eleven o'clock—pay the bill, and come on without further delay to Redwater, bringing with him a man named John Hutchins and his daughter, and the valises. This note was sent by Bailey (who, having removed his livery, was once more engaged in sweeping the drive) to the driver of the chaise at the ale-house in Rickham.

About five in the afternoon a comfortable coach-and-pair brought the luxurious parson, with John Hutchins and his daughter, up the drive. It surprised Blase to find that the daughter was a young

woman, for he had somehow formed an idea of her as being still a child ; but it surprised him still more upon drawing near to find that her pretty face was the same he had seen peeping through the bedroom curtains of the Bag o' Nails, in the morning. It was dusk, yet he saw that a blush suffused her cheeks with crimson, that her eyes were downcast, and that there was a pretty embarrassment in her manner as she curtsied to him and Captain Davenant.

“I hope you will accept my hospitality and consider my house as your home during your stay at Redwater, Mr. Tickel,” said Captain Davenant, when Blase had introduced the parson.

“I am your humble servant, sir,” replied Mr. Tickel, “and proud of the privilege of being introduced to one whose name and eulogies I have heard so frequently from my young friend here.” Then finding opportunity for an aside, he said to Blase,

with a wink of approval, "I only hope we are to stay here. 'Gad I smell the roast already, and the ride has given my appetite a whet as you shall see."

"Mr. Hutchins," said Captain Davenant, "I have heard with sorrow the history of your misfortunes from my grandson; and if you will not take it amiss to receive assistance from strange hands, my daughter and I will endeavour to find you some remunerative occupation which will obviate the necessity of your returning to the seafaring life, for which it seems you have a disinclination. For you, my dear," he said, addressing John Hutchins's daughter, "I believe my daughter can provide, if you are disposed to accept service. Until suitable arrangements are concluded, I beg you both to accept the shelter of my roof."

"Sir," said John Hutchins, fingering the hat he held in his hand, "I know not how to thank you. I have received so little

kindness in my life that I have not learnt the common expressions of gratitude. But believe me, sir, the generosity of Mr. Godwin and this unlooked-for kindness on your part, makes me desire no greater happiness than to make you aware of my due appreciation."

This proper address gave the old captain complete satisfaction, for happily he could not know that the latter part had been laboriously studied from the dictation of Mr. Tickel in the carriage, and so he dismissed the father and daughter with a gracious smile and nod of approval, signing to Bailey to lead them to the servants' hall.

"We take supper at eight, Mr. Tickel; but if you would like a glass of home-made wine and a slice of cake in advance——"

"Thank you, Captain Davenant. I thank you with all my heart; but I have that respect for your cook which forbids me to play such a trick upon my appetite."

“In that case, sir, Blase shall show you your room at once.”

They entered the house; the parson expressed rapturous admiration of everything that met his eyes, and paused in the hall to examine the old pictures, which in that light there was no possibility of seeing. “What’s this I hear?” he whispered to Blase, as they ascended the stairs—“‘Cake,’ cake! cake, for a man like me.”

“And home-made wine,” said Blase, gravely.

“Hemlock rather! Home-made wine! Not while my name’s Tickel. Home-made wine! ’Twas a jest, of course. Why the house smells of the buttery. I catch a whiff of cobwebs and old oak sawdust every time I inhale a breath. Wait till the port appears, I shall give the old gentleman my opinion upon home-made wine. I shall have my little joke ready.”

“I don’t think my grandfather cares for jokes of that kind.”

“Thanks for telling me. I know some of these old soakers have their hobbies; but to think of a man with a house like this talking of home-made wine. Hum!” They had come to the bedroom. “No fire!”

“My grandfather never lights a fire, except in the dining-room, until December.”

“A devilish long while to wait for a warm. But *I* don’t complain; for happily my nature is one which accommodates itself to the irregularities of life; and so that I have but my stomach well filled with substantial cheer, and my system thoroughly warmed with wines or spirits, I can manage to keep warm in such a bed as this. Look you, Blase, ’tis an ell thick of goose down. Ha! ha! I see our rigid host’s weakness.”

“’Tis not for feathers. I believe he sleeps on a mattress by preference.”

“Tut, tut! The prejudices which lay

hold upon old men are prodigious, and ten times more terrible than the natural diseases. I would rather die green, my young friend, than live to be tormented by crotchets whereby the very salt of life loses its savour. See what this worthy old gentleman misses by his fancies; for is there anything more soothing to the soul than to lie half buried in a downy bed, watching the flickering reflections of a fire on the wall, until the eyes, subdued by the grateful glow, close in delicious languor, and the soul melts with an exquisite sense of beatitude into unconsciousness."

"Come, you old heathen, are you ready to descend?"

"One moment, Blase. There's nothing like a good rinse of the face before eating. By the way, my young friend, 'twas an unhandsome trick you played upon me this morning, leaving me alone and not a word to tell what had become of you. That

slandering little man was round again this morning, and I expected every minute that there'd be violence done by that villain of an innkeeper. What chance think you a man of my size would have of getting out of a horse pond? Why did you not rap at my door?"

"Kicking the door could not wake you."

"Ah, no wonder I slept heavy when I did drop off, which was not till day was breaking, for believe me, Blase, I could not get a wink all night for thinking of the vile things said against you last evening. Well, I am determined I'll worry myself no more about that. I sent a lad to the inn where we supped yesterday, for the things I left there. Zooks, my young friend, that was a pretty tussle we had on the road. Did you see how the rascals made for my valise? But I managed to somehow beat 'em off: 'tis astonishing what a man can do when he's put to it. I

should have killed the rascal if he had stayed."

"You unblushing old rascal! Didn't you drop the bag and run before the fellows were out of the bush?"

"Not I," said the parson stoutly; "I didn't budge till I saw you in danger; and then 'twas but to fetch help for you. However, we will say no more of that; I am not boastful. But 'twas mighty odd that just as I ran for succour in one direction, assistance should come to you from t'other, wasn't it? I fell into conversation with John Hutchins, and to my surprise, heard how he came up and carried your bag for you!"

"Now I see how the cards lie. You have given this precious version of your story to him, and repeat it to me to forestall discovery."

"Be sure I told him nothing but the truth. You should know me well enough

for that, my young friend. Psha! I detest this cat-and-dog conversation. Let us be genial, Blase, let us be pleasant. What do you think of John Hutchins's daughter, little Peggy, eh, my boy? There's a pretty round, white, little chin, eh? and what eyes! What merry little twinklers! As sweet a little rogue as I should wish to see. The father's a good, honest fellow. He told me how he lost his prize-money; and it seems he's willing to accept any honest means of obtaining a livelihood. If you take my advice, Blase, you will have him fitted with a decent suit of clothes, and make him your body servant."

"Have I not just discharged all my servants because I could not afford to keep them?"

"That's true. But you have given this Hutchins a guinea or two, and I would like to know how you can get rid of him after that?"

Blase was deep in thought, and made no reply.

“If you must be generous,” continued the parson, drawing on his wig neatly, “and are hard pressed, it is necessary to be economical; and I ask you, as a rational being, if it is not better to keep Hutchins as your servant on ten shillings a week than to give him some four or five guineas once a month because the poor wretch can’t get employment? He’s a sturdy, strong fellow, and we’re in a lawless part of the country, where one can’t walk a couple of miles without being set upon by footpads. Your birth and position require that you should have one servant at least; and I can tell you, Blase, that it is not quite consistent with my character as a churchman to be lugging travelling bags at your heels.”

“I have one word of caution to give you,” said Blase, who had paid no heed

to the latter part of Mr. Tickel's observations—"Do not let it be known to my grandfather, or any one in this house, that I am in need of money."

"My young friend, you may rely upon my discretion. 'Tis an unpleasant fact which I will not acknowledge to myself whilst there's a chance of the difficulty being overcome. There's no other hint that may serve us?"

"None."

On the top of the staircase the parson sniffed the air critically, and said in a low voice to Blase :

"Haunch of venison, or I'm a Dutchman."

Candles were lit upon the table in the dining-room, and the twinkle of the polished silver and glittering glass arranged on the snowy cloth were reflected in the parson's eyes as they dwelt upon these magnificent preparations for a repast.

Captain Davenant introduced his daughter to Mr. Tickel, and they sat before the fire until Bailey, having finished the arrangement of the table, came towards them and, with a low bow, announced that his mistress and master were served; then they took their seats, and Captain Davenant, in deference to Mr. Tickel's cloth, said :

“Sir, may I ask you to bless our meal?”

Mr. Tickel, who was sitting beside Aunt Gertrude, with a broad, bland smile upon his face, heard the request with as much astonishment as an exile, after many, many years, might listen to words spoken in the land of his birth. Then, suddenly comprehending the situation, he dropped his head, and an awful gravity overspread his countenance. In the long silence that ensued Blase found it difficult to look serious. For full three minutes they sat with bowed heads in silence

before the parson could recollect fitting words for the occasion.

“Ar-mun!” said the old servant impressively when at length grace was said.

The parson raised his head with a profound sigh of relief, and glanced across the table at Blase, who however carefully avoided meeting his eye for fear of betraying his feelings.

Then Bailey, pulling back the cuffs from his knuckles, removed the cover from the great dish, but with some difficulty, because of its size and weight; and Blase had to fix his eyes more steadfastly than ever on his bread, lest he should catch a glimpse of the parson’s face.

Indeed, it was a study at that moment, for, eagerly following the first movements of the servant to see what rich and luscious meat that grand cover concealed, his eyes fell first on a large space of silver, then on

a moderately broad space of white napkin, and finally on a dozen snippets of toast spread with melted cheese.

It was a dish such as the parson had in his recollection never before sat down to. Astonishment for a moment held his tongue; then, curiosity overcoming that feeling, he said timidly :

“May I ask—ah—what this dainty little dish is?”

“Rammequins, sir, rammequins,” replied Captain Davenant; “a favourite dish of my daughter’s.”

“Then it must be excellent indeed,” Mr. Tickel said gallantly; after which he added in a reflective murmur, “Rammequins.”

Captain Davenant served his daughter with three of the snippets, then he offered three to Mr. Tickel.

“One, Captain Davenant, if you please,” said the parson, who was not quite sure whether he should like the *hors d'œuvre*.

“Oh, sir, no ceremony I beg,” cried the captain. “You admitted that you were hungry.”

“My appetite is unabated I assure you, sir.”

“Then I shall insist upon you taking your full share.”

Mr. Tickel made no opposition. What was one or two mouthfuls more or less to one who intended to eat till the courses were all removed?

“Welsh rare-bit, as I live,” said the parson to himself, as he tasted the delicacy. “Well, of all the things in the world to begin a supper with this is the strangest.”

The servant coming behind him with two large tankards, asked if he would “ha’ zome ale or zome zider.”

“No cider, thank you,” said Mr. Tickel, feeling a painful twinge in his stomach with the very suggestion, “A little ale—not much.”

When Blase had eaten his toast and cheese, he cut himself a crust and buttered it. Mr. Tickel looked across at him in silent wonder. Captain Davenant followed the example, and helped himself to a morsel of bread and butter, and passed the loaf to the parson, who, not to look dainty, cut a crust and made a pretence of eating it.

“If I ruin my appetite with any more nonsense of this kind may I be shot,” said Mr. Tickel to himself. “They take it pretty leisurely to begin with; but if we go on at this rate when shall we finish?”

Captain Davenant now started the subject of Catholic disabilities, and as this was a subject on which the parson was supposed to know something, he had to concentrate all his thoughts on the subject for a while in order to conceal his ignorance; but a faintness came over him at the thought that they had come to the Church

and State before a glass of wine had been emptied. It somewhat restored his courage to see the great dish removed, for he counted on the next course to open a new subject of conversation. When the old servant returned he carried off the silver and glass piece by piece, and finally took away the table cloth, when the curiosity experienced by Mr. Tickel during the earlier part of the proceedings gave place to a feeling of intense dismay.

Not a sign of hot grog, not a sign even of more ale followed the withdrawal of the cloth, and when at length the trying conversation upon ecclesiastical subjects was brought to an end, and Mr. Tickel retired to his bed-chamber, he was in a condition to eat cake and drink home-made wine with a relish.

“Three little rammequins and a glass of table beer,” he groaned, as he laid his head on the pillow. In the night he awoke from

a hideous dream, produced by the cravings of hunger, and as he turned over upon his side, he murmured once more :

“Three rammequins and a glass of table-beer.”

CHAPTER XI.

BLASE GOES AMONGST HIS FOES, AND IS
DISCOMFORTED.

GODWIN'S Moat was one of those ancient fortified dwelling-houses of which but few exist now in England. It stood in a valley—a quadrangular building with high pointed gables at the four corners, a square watch tower on the eastern side, commanding the low stone arched way which replaced the ancient drawbridge, and the upper story half-timbered in the early English style overhanging the moat, which surrounded the house and gave it its name. On the western side another bridge communicated with the garden, which extended beyond three sides of the

moat, and was enclosed by a thick holly hedge. The eastern front was open to the road. A low stone parapet ran round the outer edge of the moat, and a pair of iron gates closed the way by the bridge to the east entrance below the watch tower.

It was to these gates Blase Godwin came. Finding them fastened he rang the deep-toned bell, and, waiting for admission, looked about him for those signs of disorder which he naturally expected to see. He found nothing to bear out his anticipations ; there were no indications of confiscation and neglect such as the little bookseller had predicted. The house was in perfect repair, the gardens neat and well kept, the woods rising from the valley showed no significant gaps, and the arable lands belonging to the estate through which the road passed were still under cultivation.

A servant came to the gate.

“Is Sir Gilbert at home?” Blase asked.

“Ees, mäster, he be.”

“Open the gate.”

“Be you Mäster Godwin, zur?”

“Yes.”

The servant at once unlocked the gate, while Blase threw himself off his horse, speculating on the means by which his visit had been anticipated.

“Where is Sir Gilbert?” he asked, handing the reins to the servant.

“He be a taking of his lunch in the hall, but you be to go in to the lib’ry, zur.”

Blase strode through the gateway beneath the tower, and passing the passage which led to the library, crossed the paved quadrangle towards the steps which fronted the door of the long dining hall.

It was not possible that he could feel any strong affection for the mother he had lost before he was of an age to remember, but a feeling of awe came upon him as he

glanced up at that part of the building where the unfortunate lady had been murdered; and she was still in his mind when, opening the door, his eyes fell directly upon the man who had murdered her.

Father Dominick was seated at the table, a bilious looking, lean man, with eyes and an expression that reminded one of a hawk, with a narrow head and a few locks of grey hair which fell from a little black skull cap, and were taken back behind his ears.

He rose from his chair and bent his head low as Blaze entered. Taking no notice of this salutation, Blase turned his eyes to the head of the table where his father sat. Sir Gilbert's fists were planted on the table, holding upright his knife and fork; the latter supported a piece of brawn. The baronet, slowly turning over a huge mouthful of food, looked at his son with stolid, heavy eyes, which expressed about equal

parts of curiosity and indifference. He seemed to Blase like an ox who turns from his manger, and without ceasing to munch, regards an intruder.

Blase had time to glance at Mrs. Godwin, and her son Eugenius, before Sir Gilbert spoke.

Mrs. Godwin was, as he had seen her before, a handsome, showy woman, with quick intelligence in her long sly eyes. She was dressed in the latest and most voluptuous fashion, which displayed her fine white arms, and a large proportion of her bust. She made a familiar inclination to Blase, and only smiled when he stared with unbending front in response.

Eugenius had risen from his seat, facing Father Dominick, and now making a step towards Blase, extended his right hand. Blase put his hands in his pockets, and stared him in the face. Eugenius was a boy when Blase had last seen him ; he was

now a man. The resemblance between him and Father Dominick, although naturally much modified by the distinguishing characteristics of age and youth, was yet sufficiently pronounced to be unmistakable. A peculiarity in the eyebrows of the priest was repeated in the son's, and was in itself sufficiently unusual to strike a careless observer. The curved ridges of the brow were marked only in their ascent from the nose; and this gave them the appearance of being shaved away in half their development. For the rest the young man was of good figure and not ill-looking.

He dropped his hand by his side when Blase refused to take it, and stood with bent head and downcast eyes in an attitude of humility before him.

"He knows he's a bastard, poor hound," thought Blase, with a feeling of compassion.

"Well, Blase," said Sir Gilbert, having partly disposed of his mouthful; then he

clapped the morsel on his poised fork into his capacious mouth, and champing that, set his fist on the table again, and fixed his sluggish gaze upon his son.

“I wish to speak to you, sir, when you are disposed to give me a few minutes in private.”

Sir Gilbert moved his lips as if he wished to speak, but finding it impracticable, he made a significant gesture with his fork, and confined his efforts to mastication.

“I heard that a gentleman from London, in the company of a stout man, who said he was a clergyman, had been attacked upon the road by footpads, and that they had gone to Redwater,” said Father Dominick; “and concluding that you were that gentleman, and would in all probability come to visit your father, I instructed the servant to show you into the library.”

“In this house,” said Blase, “I go where I please, unless forbidden by my father.”

“I was about to add,” said Father Dominick quietly, “that I gave this order, thinking that you would like better to talk with Sir Gilbert in private, than in the presence of those with whom you find him now.”

“You were right, sir, in supposing that I should wish to see my father alone rather than in your company,” said Blase.

“Enough of this wrangling; ’tis a mean sort of fisticuffs,” said Sir Gilbert, pushing his chair back from the table. He drank off a glass of ale, wiped his mouth with the corner of the table-cloth, and rising continued, “we will get this business over and be done with it at once. Wife, give us a buss.”

His wife kissed him, and he, having returned her salute and bestowed an admiring glance upon her charms, thrust his hands in his breeches pockets and slouched into the adjoining room, where

he dropped into the big chair before the fire, set his feet on the dogs, and fell to whistling a jig softly between his teeth. When he had finished this overture, which was expressive of a determination to make the best of a bad job, he turned his head, without taking his hands from his pockets, and casting a glance at Blase, who had closed the door and seated himself a couple of yards from his side, he said :

“ Well, Blase, here you are back again, like a bad sixpence.”

“ ’Tis a matter for regret, sir, that I feel as keenly as you do.”

“ We can’t both talk at once, so the question is, will you speak first or shall I ?”

Blase bowed in silence, and his father continued :

“ We all knew you would come back with your tail between your legs sooner or later ; and as I saw no advantage to

myself or you by spinning out the length of your tether in London, I refused to let you have any more money when you had run through the amount set aside for you. And here you are sure enough. I needn't tell you that I'm ashamed of you. You know well enough whether you've done anything to earn a father's respect or not. You haven't even run a horse at Newmarket. For eight years you have had the finest chances of distinguishing yourself that ever a young fellow could desire. You have had unlimited means and liberty. You might have gone into parliament and thundered with all your lungs at that arch-traitor, Fox; you might have won a title; you might have bred the finest stud of horses in the country. But no, you chose to sneak about the sinks and gullies of London, punting at faro, or some such miserable pastime. Hows'ever, there's an end of that. To forgive is the duty

of a father, and a d—d hard duty it is. So to come to the point at once, if you choose to lay aside your company manners and tragedy airs, and behave with decent civility to the people in this house, you shall have your chamber, and your servant, and your horse, and as much to eat and drink as you can wish for in this house; and if you are for joining me in good honest English sports, you sha'n't have to ask twice for pocket money. These be the terms I have to offer you, and you may thank Father Dominick and my wife that they are so liberal; for of my own part I should have given you nothing, being I bear you no love, for you never showed either affection or respect for me, but was ever a rebellious young cub, breeding discord at home and carrying your whining grievances to my enemies. So there you are. I hate a lot of words, so you needn't trouble yourself

to reply. If you want money to spend elsewhere you won't get it, and if nothing else will suit you, waste no time here but go at once. But if you're for striking a good bargain while you have the chance, give me a slap o' the hand and cry 'done.'"

Sir Gilbert took his fat hand from his pocket as he said this, seeming to expect that Blase would close with the offer at once.

"I have not come to make a bargain with you, sir," said Blase. "I have not come even to ask you for money. My object is to reclaim you, if possible, from your present debased and contemptible position."

"Well, this is a good 'un, upon my life!" exclaimed the baronet, pushing back his chair to face Blase, and crossing his arms upon his great chest. "As pretty a case of pot and kettle as ever I

heard on. Will your impudence have the goodness to point out where I am in fault?"

"It is unnecessary, sir, to tell you that the company you keep is disreputable, and that you are shunned by every respectable family in the county. I shall only——"

"That for your respectable families!" cried Sir Gilbert, interrupting Blase, and snapping his thumb and finger. "What care I for the pragmatic coxcombs, the hypocrites who avoid me because I have the courage to do in public what they practice in secret? The company I keep is composed of honest lads of thew and muscle, ready at any moment to turn out with sickle and scythe to meet the invader, while these sneaking gentry would be fleeing the country for safety. I am an Englishman, and an Englishman of the old school, and I value an honest labourer above your dukes and your marquises,

and I don't care a snap for any man in the world, damme ! ”

“ There are rules of living which you by your rank as a gentleman of England are bound to observe.”

“ I will do as I please ; and what I think fit shall be my law.”

“ Sir,” said Blase, altering his tone, for he saw that nothing could be done while his father was in a state of irritation, “ I learn that when you came of age, fathers bade their sons be like you.”

“ Well, well ! ” said the baronet, greatly mollified ; “ I had my good points, I'll admit.”

“ If your principles were admirable then, they should be no less admirable now, when you have a title and a name to support.”

“ As for my principles, I warrant I was as arrant a puppy as you ; though let me tell you, sir, I hadn't the impudence to take my own father to task.”

“Did you ever hear a word said against your father?”

“No. Begad I’d have broken the head of any one who dared to utter as much as a word against him.”

“Would to heaven, father, there was nothing but a shirt between the breast of him who assails your honour and my sword.”

“Ad’s my life, that’s well said. What, you have courage, lad?”

“Prove it, sir. Give me the right to say to the next who tells me that you are not a gentleman, ‘You lie.’”

Blase sprang from his seat with these words, as if he were actually throwing the lie in the teeth of an adversary. His finely cut handsome features, his admirable manly figure, were seen at that moment to their greatest advantage.

“I didn’t know you had this kind of stuff in you, Blase,” said the baronet, looking at his son with pride.

“Father,” said Blase, his voice trembling with emotion. “Let us begin again, you and I. Let us live clean lives, and use the courage that we have to subdue the evil within us. Let us live together here, and make the name of Godwin as famous for its honourable associations, as in the days when our ancestor won his knight-hood.”

“A mighty tough job. There’s a wrestling match o’ Wednesday, a fight of two bull dogs o’ Monday to follow; why, I’ve matches made for ten weeks to come.”

“In a good fight does a man flinch before odds?”

“Not he, if he’s worth backing. This is an unlooked for turn; it wants considering of. I must take time. I don’t say you’re altogether wrong; but I won’t say you’re right neither. I’m a rare man for considering.”

“I take it, sir, you wouldn’t take long to

consider before resenting an insult put upon you."

"Not I. Word and a blow is my motto. But this is no affair of insult, and I must talk it over with Father Dominick."

"It is an affair of insult and of injury. The most outrageous injury has been put upon you, and the only words you have to say to the priest are—leave my house."

"What! tell Father Dominick to leave my house?"

"Yes. It is he who has done us the foulest wrong; he and the mistress for whom he has provided the shelter of your roof."

"Are you speaking of your mother?"

"No, sir!" cried Blase, in a passion. "I refuse to acknowledge that she is even my father's second wife. I speak of the woman who gave birth to Father Dominick's son, after he had married her to you."

Sir Gilbert turned his eyes from Blase and looked sullenly upon the floor.

Blase waited.

“Go on, if you have anything more to say,” said Sir Gilbert doggedly, after an uncomfortable silence of some minutes.

“I want to know if you consider it an insult that the son of a faithless priest should be foisted upon you, and made to bear your name?”

“There is no proof of infidelity. As for the likeness, I am convinced 'tis accidental. The matter has given rise to the only quarrels I ever had with my wife and my friend; and 'tis all settled. I have a hundred printed testimonies to resemblances as extraordinary. I'll hear no more of it.” Sir Gilbert struck the arm of his chair angrily with his fist.

“I have a witness to prove the priest's falsity. A man whose wife was cast into gaol, and who himself was impressed and

sent to sea by Father Dominick in order to conceal their knowledge from you."

"You speak of John Hutchins, a liar and a vagabond. Father Dominick has told me of him, and of the story he invented to obtain money."

"Did he tell you of this invention before he sent Hutchins to sea?"

"Have done, I say. I will hear no more. I have said I am convinced, and I will listen to no further argument. I hate the subject."

He thrust his hands deep in his pockets again, stretched out his legs, his head sunk in his shoulders, and an expression of sullen dogged obstinacy settled upon his heavy face.

"If you will not resent insult to yourself," Blase said, "you must at least do justice to my dead mother."

"What d'ye mean?" Sir Gilbert asked in unfeigned surprise.

“ I have heard within the last two days the secret that Father Dominick has so long and by such subtle means prevented me from knowing. My mother was murdered.”

“ I know nothing about subtle means. But if he has kept you from the knowledge of the murder, 'twas done in kindness. He believed it would give you pain to know it.”

“ Who murdered my mother ? ”

“ A disappointed lover, mad with revenge because she married me.”

“ 'Tis a falsehood ! Father Dominick took her life, to provide a home for his mistress, who threatened to expose him to you, and made that deed the price of her secrecy.”

“ What stuff is this ? ” cried Sir Gilbert, aroused from his stolidity.

“ 'Tis the truth ! ”

“ 'Tis a lie ! The fabrication of that old idiot at Redwater.”

“He has told me nothing. He would have concealed the disgrace from me. I learnt it from the people at Rockford, who have but one opinion on the matter, and declare that villain Dominick to be the murderer.”

“Bah! Not a word has been breathed to me.”

“Would the fellows who fatten by your degradation do anything to alter your condition? Those who might have shown you the true character of the people about you have been prevented by the priest.”

“How?”

“By intimidating some, and making your own disgrace a barrier between the rest and you. Answer me one question. father—Was it by your own wish that you set that woman up in my mother’s place so soon after her death?”

“What does it matter?”

“Judge for yourself by the consequences

of that indecent conduct. It separated you at once and for ever from those who were inclined towards you in compassion and forgiveness. 'Twas a sure means of throwing you completely into the power of the priest and his mistress."

The baronet sprang from his chair with an oath.

"I'll hear no more. 'Tis a pack of falsehoods to separate me from the woman who has never crossed me by a single word or look, and from the man who has been to me the truest friend I ever had. I see in this story which you have builded up so artfully a specimen of the cunning which report has attributed to you. You have your own ends, I warrant, in this!"

"To save you from——"

"Do I want saving? Is not my estate admirably managed, and every farthing spent accounted for? Is not my house well ordered? Am I not well served?

Is not everything done for my ease and comfort that a loving and true wife can devise? Have I ever found her doing a mean or false action? Have I ever had any convincing proof of my priest's falsity? 'Tis you whom I have to suspect and guard myself against. Having spent all your money you have a necessity for more, an itch for the acres and title that I am sorry to say must be yours one day. You would be tasting the honey before the hive's empty, and I wager would hesitate at no means of getting 'em out. Why, 'tis all clear to me; and I was a fool to give patient ear to a word of your cunning plot."

"Father, I implore you to be reasonable."

"Ha! ha! you whine and beg now that you find hectoring and bombast fail. You would drop down from your former proposal, that we should live together alone, and fight, and the rest of it, to begging a gift of

twenty pound. Out of this, I say ! your sneaking voice suits me less than your bounce. Out of it, I tell you ! or, big as you are, I'll punish you in the old style with an ash stick. Ad's life, I'll have no more of it !”

There was something of the savage and the beast in the baronet's sudden accession of fury. He showed the ungovernable ferocity which possesses a dog when he has once made the attack. Blase himself found it difficult to control his temper ; white and trembling with suppressed passion he stood for an instant in silence before his father ; then he turned his back upon him, feeling for the moment careless of his fate, and willing to abandon him to the creatures for whose society alone he was fit.

Mrs. Godwin and her son had withdrawn from the dining-hall ; Father Dominick remained in his seat on that side of the table opposite the door by which

Blase had entered. A couple of sturdy men servants were near him making a pretence of clearing the table.

Instead of walking to the door Blase passed round the end of the table and walked towards the priest; instantly the two men placed themselves before him barring the passage. Blase halted.

“Father Dominick,” he said, “Sir Gilbert has left it to me to sustain the honour of my family. Had you not taken precautions for your safety I should have taken you by the neck and flung you into the moat. I accuse you of murdering my mother, and disgracing my father, in order to provide for the welfare of your mistress and your son, and I call upon you to prove your innocence by meeting me at once with swords in the quadrangle.”

“You are fully aware, Mr. Godwin,” replied Father Dominick, speaking slowly and distinctly, “that my respect for your

father and for the Church, of which I am an ordained priest, must prevent me from accepting your challenge, even if I felt inclined to attach importance to a charge made in a moment of anger."

"I am not surprised at your refusal. A wretch who uses the dagger against a woman could not have the courage to face the sword of a man. Keep a guard about you, for, by the Lord, if we meet man to man you shall not escape the punishment of your crimes."

CHAPTER XII.

BLASE RETURNS TO HIS FRIENDS, AND IS
COMFORTED.

WITH a rueful countenance Blase trotted back to Rickham, left his nag at the ale-house whence it had been hired, and walked on to Redwater. He found Captain Davenant walking in the drive.

“Thank God you are safe home again, my boy,” the old gentleman said. He turned towards the house, and let his handkerchief flutter in the wind; from one of the upper windows a handkerchief was waved in reply. “Poor Gerty,” said the captain in explanation, “divined whither you had gone, and has suffered great anxiety in consequence, imagining nothing less terrible than that you would

be assassinated. I myself unreasonably shared her fears to some degree, for age makes women of us—the reason growing feebler than the heart. Give me your arm, sir—so,” he pressed the young man’s arm affectionately to his side; “now tell me what has happened.”

Blase recounted all that had taken place. Captain Davenant listened in silence.

“’Tis as we feared,” he said, when Blase had finished. “Your father is the slave of his passion for this vile woman, and were her guilt proved he would not have the strength to abandon her. The devilish cunning of Father Dominick provides a fair show of reason to justify Sir Gilbert in the course to which his passions incline him. And against his position thus fortified what can our efforts avail?”

“Nothing,” said Blase in a tone of deep despondency. “His enemies and ours are too strong for us.”

“Had it been otherwise I should have avenged my poor child’s wrong when my blood was fired with a feeling of revenge. I was a young man then, and even the shame of making a family misfortune the theme of public scandal would not have stayed me from appealing to the law had I seen a chance of crushing the conspiracy and separating Sir Gilbert from the woman who was the cause of this crime. We can do nothing, Blase. For you, my boy, ’twill be more to your profit to make your own name honourable than to attempt to redeem your father’s.”

Blase did not reply. “’Tis natural,” thought he, “that the old boy should hate my father;” and then he fell to wondering by what means he could make for himself an honourable position in the world, with which unfruitful speculation he was yet occupied when they came to the steps of the house. On the top stood Aunt Gerty,

her pretty face and sweet eyes radiant with gladness, a bright ribbon in her bosom, and her soft white hair drawn back from her brow under one of those hoods now going out of fashion but which in her younger days were much commended by Mr. Spectator. As she caught sight of her dear nephew's gravely anxious face, her expression became as full of care as his.

"You are not hurt, dear?" she said in a tone of tender anxiety. "Nothing terrible has happened?"

"Nothing, dear," said Blase, smiling. "Matters are only just as bad as they were, and the result of my expedition is neither worse nor better than we expected it to be. 'Tis not a cheerful business, and as it's all over I ought to be gayer than I seem."

Aunt Gerty kissed him, and so concealed from him whatever emotion this result produced in her mind, then taking him

away from her father, she drew him into the house, nestling as close to his side as possible and linking her fingers over his arm.

“You must be tired and famished,” she said. “But you shall not be kept waiting for dinner. ’Tis taking off the spit at this moment.”

“We shall dine alone to day,” said Captain Davenant. “Our conversation after breakfast turning upon ecclesiastical architecture I spoke of the ruins of Tilton Abbey, whereupon the good man, who seems to be an enthusiast in these matters, begged permission to visit the ancient monument without delay. He was not in the least retarded by hearing it was twelve miles distant. He borrowed a chaise in the village and left here at ten o’clock, taking John Hutchins with him. Gerty, you provided him with some refreshment to take upon the road?”

"I cut some sandwiches, and insisted upon his taking them, although he declared he could go very well until supper-time without them so long as his mind was occupied. He has suffered greatly, Blase dear, I should think."

"Not lately, I think," replied Blase.

"I assure you at breakfast-time I watched his face with painful interest. He wore a most deplorable expression: it may be only the effect of study."

"That is possible, dear."

"You cannot tell how glad I am that you have such a man for a companion," said Aunt Gertrude. "There are moments when all of us feel the need of serious conversation; and it must be doubly gratifying to you after the giddy whirl and turmoil of the day, to listen to his edifying discourse in the calm close of evening."

"He seemed reluctant to express any decided opinion last evening upon the

religious topics of the day," remarked Captain Davenant.

"Great thinkers are sometimes but poor talkers, I believe, sir," said Blase, not seeing a better excuse for the parson's natural silence with regard to a subject which he never touched upon from year's end to year's end.

"Modesty is also the characteristic of wise men," said Aunt Gertrude; "and I am convinced that he is wise, and that he studies a great deal. For I have observed that most of our eminent divines are stout, and 'tis not to be wondered at—the mental occupation required by their function precluding physical exercise."

"I'd give ten guineas," thought Blase, "for the parson to hear this."

"The more eminent a divine is," continued Aunt Gertrude, "the stouter he must be."

"Then Tickel deserves to be a bishop,"

said Blase, laughing as he took his place at the table.

With this break in the conversation Blase fell into the sombre mood to which his spirits were most inclined. It was so clear that he was thinking of his father, and suffering from the humiliation of his recent discovery, that his affectionate relatives could not but suffer with him and for him. Reference to the subject was forbidden by Captain Davenant's repugnance to open discussion upon it, and Aunt Gertrude's ready wit so forsook her in this emergency that the more she endeavoured to find some topic which would lead her dear nephew's thoughts into a pleasanter channel the more impossible she found it to speak at all. Often she raised her eyes furtively to glance across the table at him in anxious sympathy. Captain Davenant, on the other hand, firmly repressed his own instinctive move-

ments of commiseration, and after clearing his throat once or twice renewed the conversation.

“Talking of Mr. Tickel,” he said, “I spoke with him this morning touching an employment for John Hutchins, and he tells me you intend to engage him as your servant.”

“John Hutchins—ah, yes—there was some talk of it last night, I recollect.”

“I think you will do well to have him. He is an intelligent and fairly educated man, and your kindness has already attached him to you in a remarkable degree. He assured me that he desired no better fortune than to serve you.”

“I suppose I must have a servant.”

“No gentleman in your position is without one, dear,” said Aunt Gertrude.

“The parson shall settle matters with him, in that case.”

“His daughter I shall keep with me.

She is a lively, pretty, little body. Hannah is getting old, and this young girl will help her and make the house gay. I heard her singing very prettily this morning. I think she will be happy with us."

"She will be, dear, if happiness arises from the kindness of those we love." And with this compliment Blase closed the theme and relapsed into his moody meditations; whilst those who loved him turned his words over in their minds and put serious constructions upon his most careless observations.

After dinner, when Captain Davenant retired to his closet to take his habitual doze, and Aunt Gertrude was thus placed in sole and happy possession of Blase, she poured out her heart to him, making him feel how small his merits were by her lavish yet sincere praises. Her father had spared her the knowledge which he pos-

sessed of his grandson's faults. The only fault she knew was his neglect, and that was forgotten now that he was with her. She was blind as women are to the sins of those they love, and Blase had not the courage to open her eyes to his unworthiness. He repented heartily, and vowed to himself that he would henceforth deserve her love and trust.

“’Twas good and noble of you, Blase,” she said, “to try and turn your father’s heart. You have failed, and ’tis but natural in a good son to grieve that such should be the result. But do not despond, dear. The ways of Providence are sometimes slow to our impatient view, but surely and unerringly the great work of Justice is wrought to its conclusion. Only when the harvest is gathered can we measure the benefits of rain and heat. Be patient, dear, and do that which seems to you highest and best, and the reward

must follow. Who knows but that the fame of your good life reaching your father's ear may awake the dormant goodness in his heart?"

"Would it might be so!" said Blase, pressing the hand that lay trembling on his arm. "'Tis the wish nearest to my heart. But what can I do? I have not thought of the future until now; I have not thought of being anything but what I am—an idle gentleman. I have not the special gifts which make the statesman, the artist, or the man of science. I know not which way to turn. I am like a vessel in the midst of a sea without a notion of the course I am to steer."

"Be patient, dear, and watchful. Floating trifles guided Columbus to a new world. It is not possible for every ambitious soul to attain to greatness; but goodness is within the reach of all. Do not believe that I would discourage your

aspirations, or have you rest with us a simple country gentleman. Dearly as my heart desires that you should live here, I would not have you stay a day after you have decided upon a higher career. Nature has not made you for inaction, my dear, dear Blase. You have a noble brow ; your features distinguish you from ordinary men ; your character, even as a child, was not that of other children. Wait patiently until the moment comes when your eye detects the advantage of quick action. The smith stands idle till the iron whitens ; then—he strikes.”

Blase was silent, wondering how long he could afford to wait idle. Gertrude, watching his face, seemed to catch his thought, for she said, with a little hesitation :

“I want to speak to you upon another subject, not altogether disconnected with what we have been talking about.”

“I am all attention, dear.”

“You said at dinner-time that you supposed you must keep a servant, in a tone which seemed to imply that—that, if you could dispense with one, you would.”

“Why, how you catch at my words, you anxious, kind soul!” cried Blase. “’Tis likely enough my tone represented my feelings, though I have no remembrance of them. Servants are a plague, and I have felt less worried since I left London with none than I did before with half a dozen.”

“Is that the sole reason for your doing without them?”

“Why—you see—they are, to be sure, expensive; and one must study economy somewhat, be he ever so hairbrained.”

“I thought it might have something to do with the expense. Your father may be less liberally disposed towards you after the visit of to-day, and so, dear, I want

you to accept this." She slipped into his hand a little silk-covered purse, with the initials B. G., neatly embroidered in the centre. It might have contained notes for ten thousand pounds, or merely a few crowns; that mattered nothing to Blase. He knew that all the sweet woman had in the world to give him was there—the savings of many years, the tangible representation of a thousand tender, loving thoughts, of many joyful acts of self-denial, of constant care for him.

He took it, and thrust it in his bosom, but he could not see the giver for the tears that filled his eyes; he could speak not even a common word of gratitude for the swelling of his throat. He could only think that never was fabled angel so near divinity as this poor old maid.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH IS SET FORTH CAPTAIN DAVENANT'S FOLLY.

CAPTAIN DAVENANT had (as most elderly gentlemen have) a hobby which, from a general point of view, was just as irrational as purely selfish, and as ridiculous as other hobbies. His favourite pursuit was the collection of ancient coins, of which he had amassed some eight or ten score in a cabinet, made after his own design, and at a cost which he was ashamed to confess to. His collection was of no earthly use to any one at Redwater but himself. Blase in his young days had a hankering for them at those seasons when the game of dumps was in ; but when he found that his grand-

father was not likely to prostitute his coins to the uses of that game, he ceased to regard them with any interest whatever. Aunt Gertrude, despite her amiability, cordially detested them, and dreaded the production of the cabinet, which meant a tedious exposition upon matters resembling politics in their complexity, which she could never clearly understand, but felt bound to appreciate highly. A practical numismatist would have laughed at the collection, and would have proved quite half of them to be false and worthless; for the captain, with his perfect truthfulness, could believe no one guilty of falsehood who had the commonest ability in dissimulation, and so he became the easy dupe of a well-dressed gentleman of Jewish origin, who called upon him at intervals, and always had the good fortune to have found the very coin the captain most needed.

But the cabinet was a source of great

amusement and of pride also to the captain. He had been given to understand, and he fairly believed, that by the time it was completed his collection would be unique—as indeed, in one respect, it certainly would be—and he had a secret gratification in thinking that he should leave behind him a not unworthy heirloom. One day in the week he spent in cleaning and arranging his collection; and at these times the old gentleman was a suitable study for a figure painter as he sat erect in his high-backed chair, looking at the coin in his hand, which he had been gently polishing with a piece of chamois leather, as his mind dwelt on the curious vicissitudes through which it had passed in coming to him. For each coin had its history, and some of them had truly remarkable histories—thanks to the vivid imagination of the gentlemanly Jew.

It had never occurred to him to inquire how much his hobby cost him until this

very afternoon, when the question struck him as being of such importance that, instead of going to sleep, he brought out the little book in which he kept an account of his expenditure, and made a careful extract of the sums paid to Mr. Jacobs during the past ten years for coins, and those scarce, dilapidated, but invaluable works on the science which he sought and bought with such indefatigable zeal. The total astonished him; and for the first time he perceived the selfishness of a pleasure which restricted expenditure in a more beneficial direction.

It was some consolation to know that every item on this list of payments was considerably less than the actual value of the coin or book for which it was paid—Mr. Jacobs being, as he never failed to explain, not a dealer, but an amateur who was glad to sell his duplicate coins at considerably less than they cost him;—there-

fore, if ever he should have need of a large sum of money, he could sell his cabinet and realize a profit. Yet the prospect of making a large profit did not impart cheerfulness to the old captain's face. He unlocked the cabinet, carefully took out that beautiful specimen of a Jacobus, whose only fault was an unseen flaw which gave it a peculiar leaden sound when it was struck, and turned it over in his hand, inspected it closely through his glasses, then held it further away and looked at it under his glasses, and in both positions with evident satisfaction. Then he put it back in its place with a sigh, closed the doors, and turned the key upon his treasures. Looking up, he found Blase in the room.

"I was afraid of waking you, sir," Blase said, in explanation of his noiseless entrance. "I find you are occupied."

"Only with my cabinet; a toy, an old man's toy."

“Ah, I recollect. You had a collection of coins when I was a boy.”

“I have enlarged it considerably of late years. There are some quite remarkable specimens, which I will show you one day when we have nothing better to do, though it is a study which can have but little charm for a young man. As I say, 'tis a toy, and a toy which necessitates, perhaps, a waste of time and money. 'Tis not unlikely that I shall give it up one of these days and—and turn my mind to something of more serious importance. However, that is immaterial. Sit down, my dear boy. I want to say something to you concerning your affairs if you will allow me to do so.”

“I am your grandson, and your servant, sir,” Blase said, seating himself.

“I am reluctant to refer to an unpleasant subject; but it was suggested to my mind by an observation that fell from you at the dinner table, that possibly the breach

with your father, widened by what took place this morning, will stop the supplies of money that you have hitherto received from him. I do not wish to talk of that. I hope never again to hear your father's name until his title falls to you." With these bitter words the captain paused. After a moment or two he continued in his habitual soft tone : "What I wish to say, my dear Blase, is, that whatever happened this morning to alter your pecuniary prospects, you must continue to support with befitting dignity your position as a gentleman. If it is customary for young men of your quality to have servants, you must not be without them ; and if the expenses of maintaining a becoming equipage are beyond your means, you may be sure that any bills you may find it convenient to draw in my name will be duly honoured."

"Thank you, sir. I thank you with all my heart," Blase said, drawing nearer and

taking his grandfather's hand. "I hope, however, before my present resources are exhausted, to have hit upon some career which shall secure my independence."

"Well said, Blase!" said the old gentleman warmly; then, with anxiety only half concealed: "You have not yet fixed your mind upon any vocation, any profession?"

"Not yet, sir. 'Tis a subject I have never looked at from my present point of view."

"Ah, well; all in good time," the old gentleman said, with a sigh. "There is no hurry. Sooner or later every man finds to what use he should apply his endowments; and 'tis better for him to wait until he sees clearly what it is his duty to do than rashly to accept at haphazard the first suggested course, and to follow it in a despondent or half-hearted fashion. Let this house be your home while you will, and when you weary of our rustic simplicity,

leave us for awhile ; and remember what I said touching money, my boy."

"I am not likely to forget it, sir."

"A little notice of a couple of weeks is all I ask, that I may have the money ready at my agent's to meet your bill. And now to something else. There are your favourite authors not yet looked into."

"One's tastes alter with age. I should like better to look into your cabinet, if you have a mind to explain its contents."

"With all my heart ; though let me tell you, Blase, the study of weapons and war is more suitable to a young man."

The old captain spoke with significance, but the hint was lost upon Blase, who was just then speculating on the means by which his grandfather intended to raise money if necessary.

"He would not wear a threadbare coat if he had money by him," thought Blase.

“He is not a man to invest in speculations. If he had funded property, he would not require two weeks to transfer it to his agent. He could not make this offer so cheerfully if it involved a mortgage upon his estate. What other resources can he have?”

The cabinet was opened, and Captain Davenant at the very sight of the neatly ordered shelves became excited. His enthusiasm increased as he went from one medal to another, explaining the rare merits of each to his appreciative companion.

Natural good nature made Blase sympathetic at all times, but, warmed with love and gratitude, he found actual pleasure in the baubles which gave his grandfather so much delight. It struck him, as he listened to the histories of the coins, that Mr. Jacobs' name came in with suspicious frequency, and that the prices paid were excessively high; but he said not a word

to destroy the old gentleman's happy illusion that Mr. Jacobs was an honest gentleman, and his transactions of a most straightforward and generous description.

"You see, my dear boy," said Captain Davenant, when the last piece was examined and replaced, "'tis not alone the actual value of each separate coin, but their connection which makes them valuable. For here"—he spread out his hands towards his treasure, leaning back in his chair, and looking at it with a simple pride—"here is an almost unbroken chain of the coins found in these realms, from the denarius of the Romans to the new seven-shilling piece."

"'Tis a valuable collection, sir, I doubt not."

"My good friend, Mr. Jacobs, assures me that I may sell the collection at any time for twice the sum I have paid for the coins—twice the sum!"

“Surely you do not contemplate selling?”

“I am not sure but that I shall, Blase,” replied the old gentleman gravely, as he closed the doors of his cabinet with tender care. “It takes me a whole day once a week to polish them, and I might spend the time more profitably in reading Milton; besides, as I have been told, ’tis so much capital lying idle, and—and I do not approve of idleness.”

“Egad, sir, your lawn lies idle; three-fourths of your rooms lie idle. I would as soon see beasts grazing on the one, and t’other let off in lodgings, as have you dispose of your cabinet. ’Tis a worthy appendage to your estate, sir.”

“I am glad to hear you say so,” cried the captain warmly, “for so I have thought. Yet,” said he, checking himself, “I warrant I shall get rid of it, for all that; for ’tis astonishing how reckless I am when a caprice takes hold of me.”

If there was one man less capricious than another, it was Captain Davenant, and Blase knew this. He sat in silent perplexity as his grandfather, humming a tune, turned away to restore his cabinet to its place. Suddenly the truth dawned upon him : it was to supply his necessities that the brave old gentleman would sacrifice his own pleasure. Then Blase vowed in his heart that no privation should make him reveal his poverty to Captain Davenant.

The opportune return of Mr. Tickel and John Hutchins put an end to the interview, which at that moment was embarrassing both to Blase and his grandfather.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW BLASE WAS TEMPTED BY THE PARSON.

IN the course of the afternoon Blase found an opportunity of speaking in private with John Hutchins, when he told him briefly that he had failed to move his father from his obstinate faith in Father Dominick, and bade him, for the present at least, to lay aside all thoughts of vengeance, since it was but too clear that he was powerless against the priest, and that any punishment he, Hutchins, might attempt to inflict on him would only recoil upon himself, and increase his misfortunes.

“Sir,” said John Hutchins, “I am convinced that you are in the right. I thank you very sincerely for your advice, which

is a further proof of your kindness to me, and I assure you that I shall at all times abide by your counsel." He then begged to know if he was to enter Mr. Godwin's service, as Mr. Tickel had led him to hope; to which Blase replied in the affirmative, and then hastily escaped from the effusive thanks which the grateful fellow poured out.

Shortly after supper Mr. Tickel went to bed, excusing himself on account of a severe headache brought on by the excitement of examining the ruins of Tilton Abbey, and taking with him the cup of cordial which Aunt Gertrude desired him to drink. When a couple of hours later Blase was entering his chamber, he heard a slight cough, and, looking across the corridor, perceived Mr. Tickel standing at his bedroom door with a beckoning finger extended.

"Come in, my young friend, come in,"

said the parson, drawing Blase into his room and softly closing the door. "There's a world of things to talk about. Lord! I thought you were never coming."

"I thought you were abed of a headache?"

"Not I, Blase. I have been sitting in the chimney with a paper of tobacco, and there's still a morsel if you're for a pipe. As for my headache, I've a cordial here that cured me at once of all that ever was the matter with me. Put your lips to it, my boy. Nay, don't be afraid of the cup; I washed it out well, be sure; and this is none of your pinching herbal waters, but as fine a sample of red rum as ever came from the Indies."

He led Blase to the capacious chimney, where he had set chairs, and on one of them a paper of tobacco, a couple of long pipes, a jug, a bottle, and a small parcel of sugar.

"Relics from Tilton Abbey," Blase observed.

"The best I could find. Where they came from you shall hear presently. But, prythee, sit down and be comfortable. There's a clean pipe. God bless the architect who built this chimney, say I. Old Tickel don't forget his young friend."

"Nor himself."

"Why, Blase, are we not one, and is it not by thinking of my own comfort that I know what is necessary to yours? Will you mix your spirit with hot water?"

"How did you get that?"

"Hutchins brought it five minutes ago; he saw the light in my room, and thought I might like to shave. There's a delicacy about that man which is admirable, and an excellent servant you'll find him."

"If you don't spoil him. Be careful, parson; these old habits don't suit my new temper."

“I do not fear your displeasure while I serve you faithfully with heart and brain, lad; and as for your new temper, ’tis but the natural effect of spare diet, and you’ll be yourself, I wager, when you get back to London and a more generous table. A man’s character does not alter in a day, and ’tis something more serious than a dull fancy which can change your pleasant disposition. Lord, how I do love ye, Blase! One would think I was your brother, if all were known that I have been at for your sake to-day. However, that in good time. Empty this, my young friend, and let me hear what has befallen you since we parted in the morning. What has the baronet, your father, given you?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing, Blase! Humph. This comes, I expect, of your new temper. I warrant you weren’t over pleasant with the old knight.”

"I did not feel pleasantly disposed."

"I knew how it would be if you went alone, Blase. You wanted me behind you to jog your elbow when you were going wrong, and put a pleasant interpretation upon your words when they irritated your father. A man like that wants managing like a restive nag. You must wheedle him along the road you want him to go, and only lay on the whip when you know you have the master-hand of him. But you are so headstrong, Blase. You've no more tact than a bull in a china shop."

"Well, that's all over."

"What a chance you've lost!—the best that ever a son had, I do think. You had your father in a corner, and let him go. Oh, if I had been there! Begad, he would have given me something before I left him. Did he offer you nothing?"

"Yes—board and lodging."

"And you refused?"

“I promised to accept on condition that he would remove Father Dominick and his family. These terms my father refused, and there was an end of it.”

“And there was an end of it,” echoed Mr. Tickel, in a tone of mournful reproach. “And what an end! You couldn’t expect any man to accept such terms.”

“Do you think a man could have accepted his?”

“Why not? ’Twas your duty to save your father; but because you couldn’t do it your own way, you give him over to the Philistines. Well, dear, dear! there are some men who are for ever trying to beat in the wedge by the thick end. Look, you—what chance would he have had if you had once installed yourself there, with me and Hutchins to support you? You could have tackled your father. I would have got his wife into trouble; and, as for the priest, I wish him no more harm

than to be left alone for half an hour with John Hutchins. We couldn't have done everything in the first week, but in six we would have been masters of the field. Little by little, great things are done. If ever you're in a crowd, my young friend, you will do well to study it, and take the moral to heart. 'Tis not your strong, blustering man that gets to the front, with all his force and froth: all know he is there, and combine to resist him. 'Tis your little, oily man that silently worms his way from shoulder to chest, and chest to shoulder, by imperceptible degrees."

"Thank Heaven, I am not a little, oily man!"

"Thank Heaven, your prosperity does not depend entirely upon your efforts; and thank Heaven that sent old Tickel to be your guardian angel——"

"Show me what I have to be grateful for."

“I will. As you may suppose, Blase, my object in going out this morning was less to study antiquities than to get something to eat. My first inquiry on the road was where I could find a good inn, and my driver, nothing loath, carried me to the ‘George,’ a most excellent house, about three miles this side of Tilton Abbey ; and, truth to tell, that was as near the abbey as we got.”

“Why, you astounding old humbug ! You discoursed for a good hour on the abbey—its crypts and its cloisters, its style and its origin, with all the long-winded wordiness of a pedant.”

“As luck would have it, I found a tract on the subject at the ‘George,’ from which I learnt in half an hour more than I could have discovered for myself in a month ; and as I only read half of it, there’s matter for another excursion to the same fountain of knowledge. This, by the way, and in

confidence. I arrived there about one, and my host, at my request, clapped a piece of smoked bacon with some young greens into a pot, and prepared a couple of fat fowls for the spit at once. I was seated in a good roomy Windsor chair before the fire in the coffee-room, waiting for dinner to be served and studying Tilton Abbey, when mine host bustles in, and says he, 'Sir, your dinner is dressed, but I have to ask a favour of you, which is that you content yourself with a single fowl, for two ladies have just arrived in their chariot, and desire to be served with some victuals forthwith, as they have to push on as far as Maybridge before sundown.' You know my disposition, Blase, and how I detest eating a good dinner alone; so I bade the good man carry my compliments to the ladies, and say that if they found it agreeable to dine with me I should consider myself very highly honoured by their

company. He returned, saying that the elder lady of the two thanked me for my civility, and would gladly accept my invitation; but that the younger preferred to lie down on a bed, as she was suffering from a megrim brought on by the jolting of the carriage. Without more ado I walked into the sitting-room where dinner was laid, and in a couple of minutes the lady descended. ‘Madam,’ says I, ‘travellers must dispense with ceremony, and, for fault of a better means, I must introduce myself. My name is Joseph Tickel, and I am a minister of the Protestant religion.’ ‘Sir,’ says she with a courtesy, ‘you oblige me to be equally frank. My name is Romsey, and I am a widow.’”

“Very pretty,” said Blase; “but as we are not dining now, you can be a little less tedious. What was the upshot of all this civility?”

“This impatience does you no credit,

Blase. You are like one of those critics who would sit down to a play as the fifth act is a-finishiing."

"Time enough too, parson, when you are author."

"You shall take it as it comes from me—prologue, *dramatis personæ*, and so on to the epilogue. Being sat down to dinner, I found Mrs. Romsey a marvellous chatty woman, although of a cautious, not to say suspicious, nature, and somewhat reticent at first with regard to her own affairs; but after putting a few searching questions, this hesitation disappeared. I know not how it is, Blase, but something in my face or my manner inspires confidence. I make no merit of it. There are some whom nature stamps with a certificate of worth. It may have been that my candid and straightforward answers to the good woman's questions dissipated all doubts; suffice it to say that, before we came to

the end of the first bottle, she had given me the history of her family in all its ramifications."

"Is it necessary to repeat the details?" Blase asked, with a movement as if he were about to go.

"No. Sit down, boy. It is only necessary for you to know that the family is as good and honourable as any in the county of Monmouth, that Mrs. Romsey has a jointure of eight hundred a year unencumbered, and that her niece was left an orphan, with an independent fortune of eighteen thousand pounds, by the death of her father, Admiral Liston, in Howes' victory of '94."

"And up to this point what had you told her?"

"Having assured myself that she knew nothing of the parish of St. Bidulph's or of this county, I told her frankly that I had given up my living to accompany a young

gentleman of fortune, heir to a baronetcy and the finest estate in Dorsetshire. If I told you what else I said to our mutual credit you might accuse me of prolixity or boastfulness."

"Or falsehood. Come, finish."

"A bottle of the champagne wine which I opened on the landlord's recommendation, still further increased Mrs. Romsey's trust in me; and she told me that Miss Liston, being fourteen years of age at her father's death, chose her for her guardian, and that their position was still the same, although the young lady is now actually entitled to be her own mistress. 'But,' says Mrs. Romsey, with a modest blush, 'as one knows not what may happen to make our separation necessary, I am anxious to see my charming Lydia married to a deserving gentleman without delay.' 'You meditate taking a second husband for yourself?' I suggested. With a pretty

confusion she professed that at present she had seen no one worthy to replace the late partner of her joys. 'But there is no knowing what may happen,' she added, 'and therefore I am taking my niece to London, where my agent has furnished us a genteel house in Piccadilly with a view to providing happily for her future.'

"And for her own future as well," said Blase, laughing.

"And for her own future as well," replied Mr. Tickel slowly, and fixing his eyes expressively upon Blase.

"Well, parson, what of all this? Why are you staring at me?"

"A widow with eight hundred a year and a maid with a plum of eighteen thousand!" said the parson impressively and slowly, and without moving his eyes, which regarded Blase from an angle.

"You can't run away with them both."

"My boy, I love you too well to run

away with either till you've made your choice."

"Oh, I'm to marry one!"

"You are. I as good as promised the old woman I would take you to her house in Piccadilly."

"Supposing I have no inclination for marriage?"

"There are many things we have to do without inclination, my young friend. We sometimes have to eat dry bread because we cannot afford butter, for instance."

Blase sat in silent contemplation for a moment, then :

"Which am I to marry—the aunt or the niece?" said he.

"Which you will, my boy. There they are to your hand, fresh and innocent from the country, and knowing no one in London. I haven't seen the niece, but I suppose she is none too healthy by her choosing to lay a bed after a ride instead

of sitting down to a good dinner; but the aunt pleases me. She's a fat, comfortable soul, with a wondrous fund of conversation, for she'll say the same thing over half a dozen times rather than be silent, and an apoplectic expression—the kind of woman who might go off at any moment.”

“Begad, you offer me the choice of two invalids for a wife!”

“I do; and if you take my advice, you will begin on the aunt with a view of finishing off with the niece.”

“I don't care for that joke, parson.”

“Joke. Do you call my advice a joke?”

“No, I don't call it a joke; and if you intend it for one, you have a deplorable sense of humour.”

“I was never more serious in my life, Blase; and with good reason, for I must tell you the note you gave me t'other day

is spent, and there are precious few to follow."

"And seriously, you advise me to marry for money?"

"Well, as you can't have much tender feeling for women you've never seen, what else should you marry for?"

"You told this woman I was a man of fortune."

"I told her I gave up my living to travel with a young gentleman of fortune; that was near enough to the truth, I hope. And if she jumps to the conclusion that you have the wealth of Golconda, 'tis not for us to undeceive her. Your estimable grandfather teaches you a better lesson than that."

"And you propose that I shall take advantage of this foolish woman's mistake, to marry her, or her sickly niece, to secure myself from want."

"That's it, Blase. There you have it,

plan and elevation, and all you have to do is to work out the design. I demand no thanks; I ask no recompense save this, that when you stand on the summit of your good fortune, you will remember that the foundation was laid by your good old parson."

Mr. Tickel's voice was husky as he spoke, and his little eyes were filled with tears. It may have been that he actually felt emotion in thinking of the future he had provided for the young man whom he loved better than anyone else in the world—himself excepted. On the other hand, a little of the fiery spirit might have caught his throat, and been turned to sentimental advantage.

Blase knew the parson too well to be moved by his false sentiment to compassion, or by his unprincipled suggestion to anger.

"Do you think I am a gentleman?" he asked coolly.

“To be sure, I do ; but a cursed poor one, let me tell you. But what of that ?” cried the parson hopefully. “You have the marks of birth and breeding, together with a face and person which no woman can look upon without losing her heart. You must win.”

Blase rose with a short laugh.

“Get thee behind me,” he said, and turning his back upon the parson, he took up his chamber candle and left the room.

The audacity of Mr. Tickel's proposal was to Blase a striking demonstration of the desperate position in which he stood. He reckoned that the expenses of returning to London would leave him with half a dozen guineas ; and when these were spent, what was to be done ? That was a question that Blase sat down, resolved to answer ; but an hour's earnest thinking only proved to him the impossibility of finding any satisfactory means of escape from penury.

The flickering of the candle by his side, warned him that he would soon be left in the dark. Then he took from his bosom the little silk covered pocket-book Aunt Gertrude had put into his hand, and untying the ribbon, opened it. It astonished him to find how much it contained; there were notes for four hundred and fifty pounds. She could not have saved so much from economy in household matters; for her father's sake, she would not have subtracted so much from his small income. Suddenly the true solution of the mystery revealed itself to Blase.

"'Tis the poor soul's dowry," he said to himself, "the slender portion she was to have taken to her husband. She has renounced all hope of marriage in giving this to me." He sat with the little book in his hands for some minutes, his heart melting in love and pity, as he thought of that gentle woman cheerfully sacrificing

the great hope of womanhood for his sake ; then he said, half aloud, “ dear soul if I abuse thy gift, may I lose even thy love.”

This discovery dwelt in his mind, and soothed his spirit ; he recalled her words, and they did more than all his previous speculation to make the future hopeful. He felt that good must ultimately come by doing right, and he fell asleep with the agreeable conviction, that by keeping the pure idea of Aunt Gertrude before him he could do no wrong. He was too drowsy, perhaps, to reflect that there are certain conditions under which the best of aunts must be lost sight of. That conviction was for the morrow.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW BLASE WAS TEMPTED BY A PRETTY MAID.

IN the morning John Hutchins, having shaved his new master and tied his hair, left the room, walked briskly down the corridor, and descended the great stairs at the end. As his head disappeared from view, his daughter Peggy stepped from behind a door at the other end of the corridor, where, through the chink, she had watched his movements. In a smart cap and bib which she had sat up half the night to make out of material given her by Miss Davenant, in a calico skirt looped up over a short petticoat, dark worsted stockings, and well polished ankle shoes, Peggy

looked as pretty and neat a little chambermaid as was ever seen off the stage or on it. She carried a feather brush in her hand, and with this she busied herself upon the wainscot, which, truth to tell, she had thoroughly dusted half an hour before when her father passed on his way to Mr. Godwin's room, working from panel to panel towards the staircase, and humming a pretty little tune in a very soft voice as she went.

There were only two panels between her and Mr. Godwin when he came from his room; but he turned towards the staircase without seeing her. Perhaps at that moment Aunt Gertrude was still before his eyes.

Brushing more vigorously than ever, Peggy sang a little louder; then suddenly stopped, with a slight exclamation of fright and surprise, and made a becoming courtesy as Blase turned to see who it was that sang.

For a moment Blase was in doubt. The girl had been out of his mind altogether. The corridor was dark, and at first he saw only a pretty girlish figure, standing in bold relief against the strong light from the great window at the end of the gallery, then he recognized the face he had seen for the first time peeping through the curtains at the inn. He nodded to her, and went on his way, feeling a thrill of pleasure as he recalled the coquettish impudence with which her eyes had followed him from the inn window.

He descended the stairs slowly; at the angle some bewitchment caused him to look up, Peggy with her hands resting on the balusters was looking down. She just smiled and blushed when their eyes met, but she made no attempt to move until Blase, with a glance below, turned to reascend, then she fled. He did not pursue her, but from that moment her pretty

face and long dark eyes took possession of his thoughts to the exclusion of Aunt Gertrude.

He caught glimpses of her several times during the day, for he found frequent occasions to go from one part of the house to another, but it happened always that her father was somewhere within sight. He hoped to find her dusting the wainscot the next morning, and for that reason, dismissed John Hutchins some five or ten minutes before leaving his room; but he found no one in the corridor, except John Hutchins, who himself was busy with the feather-brush. To a man of gallantry obstructions only serve to give piquancy to the pursuit, and Blase thought considerably more of Peggy, by reason of not seeing her, than if the freest scope had been given to their meeting.

The experience was not new to him. He never had refused the invitation of

bright eyes to engage in an amour ; and it made no difference to him, whether the petticoat was of silk or of homespun, so that the wearer was tolerably young and pretty. To do as he did, was merely to obey an article in the peculiar code of honour by which the polite world was governed. To want gallantry was to want manliness. And so doctrine, and habitude, and a still vagrant inclination, drew Blase back into the past he wished to abandon. His hot blood was incompatible with a cool reason. Once it occurred to him that he was neglecting duty for Peggy, and that his whole attention should be devoted to the discovery of a suitable career ; but he dismissed the thought impatiently, saying to himself, that a few days or weeks could make no difference, that it was useless to make himself and everybody else wretched, and that the wisest course was to wait patiently till something presented itself.

It seemed, however, that the amour was to die out from Peggy's disinclination to sustain her part in it. That day and the following morning passed, and he saw nothing of her. This indifference irritated Blase, as indifference irritates most of the stronger sex when they are gracious enough to throw the handkerchief, and he resolved that when he saw Miss Hutchins again, he would have his revenge, either by taking no notice of her at all, or treating her as if she were merely a pretty child. An opportunity came when he was descending from his room, after dressing for dinner. Aunt Gertrude was coming up stairs, and behind her was Peggy carrying a work-basket. The girl's eyes were quicker than her mistress's, she saw Blase the moment the angle of the stairs was turned, and her eyes beamed upon him with all their full warmth. Blase met the melting gaze with stony indifference, and

then hailed his aunt in the most tender tones of affection.

Aunt Gertrude stopped to speak to her dear boy. Peggy placed herself so that she could be seen by Blase only. The blush had faded away and left her cheek pale; her pretty white teeth clasped her nether lip; there was a look of apprehension in her face which Blase either did not or would not see.

“Why, my dear Blase, where did you get that rose from?” asked Aunt Gertrude; “I thought there was not one left.”

“One, and one only,” Blase said, in some confusion. “I found it—dear me, where did I find it?”

It seemed to be very difficult for him to remember where he had found it; he stammered and hesitated, and grew as pink as the bud itself, which, as a matter of fact, he had found lying on his dressing table,

and had stuck it in his coat, fancying that it was laid there by Aunt Gertrude.

“Why, you surely did not find it on the bush by the gate?” said she, coming to his assistance.

“That is exactly where I did find it, though,” said Blase.

“Well, do you know, I thought I saw a bud there the other day, but this morning when I looked, I could not find it.”

“Which is not to be wondered at, as I had been before you, is it?” said Blase, with a very hearty laugh; and then he took out the rose and put it in Aunt Gertrude’s knot, and kissed her with unfeigned amiability, for there was now no thought of vengeance in his heart. He knew who had laid the bud on his table, and as Aunt Gertrude passed on, he turned his eyes, glowing with passion, upon Peggy’s sweet eager face. He snatched up her disengaged hand and pressed it, whilst with his lips

he formed the words "This evening." The girl dared not linger an instant, but as she moved away she shook her head and raised her eyebrows, as if not understanding the words he had shaped. He repeated them, and she shook her head again, looking back with the most woe-begone expression, as if she had lost the dearest object of her wishes.

He looked about from side to side when he went upstairs at night-time, half expecting to catch some sign of the girl, albeit Hutchins preceded him with a light.

"'Tis better so," he thought, and yet not without a secret feeling of disappointment; "if she had caught my meaning she might have contrived to elude observation, and met me, and Heaven only knows what would have followed, for 'tis clear she is more in earnest than I thought."

Those who deceive are always suspicious, and Blase felt certain that there was more

than a mere desire to serve him in the assiduity of Hutchins to fulfil the office of a valet; and he was not slow to resent this kind of surveillance. He refused to have his hair undressed, or his shoes removed, and dismissed the man curtly, saying in a cavalier tone it might not suit him to go to bed for another hour or so.

Hutchins bowed respectfully and withdrew. Blase threw himself in a chair, and closing his eyes, gave himself up to one of those fascinating reveries—his was shadowed by regret—which follow the accidents of an unaccomplished amour. He saw again, in imagination, the dark eyes, round with anxiety lest he should betray where he found the rosebud, and then the quick eager joy that shone upon her face when Aunt Gertrude's back was turned, and he and she were hand in hand, face to face, and then—the reverie was broken abruptly. A low creaking sound from the

opposite side of the room caused Blase to open his eyes. Facing him was an ancient wardrobe with heavy folding doors. One was partly opened. He thought it moved as he looked. Another creak and all doubt ceased. Someone was concealed there; he could imagine only that it was a house-breaker. He rose, strode across the room, and flung the door back, and there stood revealed Peggy, looking only less scared than he. She raised her finger to enjoin silence, and stepping lightly out, came close to him and looked up timidly in his face.

“You!” was all Blase could say.

“Did not you say ‘this evening’?” she asked in a faltering whisper.

“But ’tis night, child.”

“I could not escape before. My father suspects me cruelly. Oh, you can’t tell how he watches me. He seems to know my very thoughts. He made me go to my room two hours ago, and since then he has

been watching the stairs, so that I could not creep up until you called him into the dining-room."

Blase was grave. He began to be sensible of his own fault.

"Did you expect me before? Have you been waiting? Are you angry with me?" asked the girl, looking up imploringly. She had expected a reception so different.

"No, I am angry with myself," said Blase; "you have only too well responded to a wish that I ought never to have expressed."

"But you did wish to see me?" she asked with eagerness.

"Yes, I—I wished to—to thank you for the bud," stammered Blase; but she waited to hear only the first half of the sentence, and then said:

"Then if you wished to see me you need not be angry with yourself or me, for I am here."

As she spoke she raised her hands involuntarily, and they fell trembling upon his shoulders, her cheeks aflame and her eyes twinkling as though his dazzled them. Blase need have had a temperament of steel to withstand such temptation. He circled her with his arms and drew her to him, while her hands sliding from his shoulders, linked behind his neck.

“ You pretty angel ! ” he whispered thickly, bending his lips down to her burning cheeks. She made a little moan of delight.

He held back his head to look at her face, and she drew hers away to look at his, loosening her hands. Her eyes did not falter now, but looking into his with fearless fervour, seemed to pierce his very soul. Her parted lips showed the little white teeth set close ; then, as she still looked, her eyes lost their wide expansion, her lips curved, the strenuous look upon her

face melted into a soft delicious smile, her limbs trembled, and she sank as if all strength had gone from her. As Blase took her to his breast again he raised her so that her feet scarcely touched the ground. He felt that the girl was his to do with as he would. Intoxicated with passion, powerless to do either right or wrong, he held her thus raised in his arms for a moment, then, his better nature awaking to a sense of shame, his arms relaxed. "Coward!" cried conscience, "would you ill-use the child that lies helpless on your breast?" There was a chair beside him; he bent and gently placed the girl in it, and then stood back, breathing heavily and quick like a man who pauses in his struggle to collect his forces. The girl was trembling violently; she dared not look him in the face, she covered her eyes with her hands.

"This must finish. God help me!" muttered Blase.

She did not catch his words though she heard him speak. She trembled more violently, and daring to raise her head she looked significantly towards the door. It was unlocked. The conflict between passion and principle still raged in the man's bosom. He went towards the door with the intention of locking it. There he stood irresolute and turned to look at the girl; she was toying with the kerchief crossed upon her bosom. Abandoning all scruples he sought the key and then—

“Why must I lock this door?” he asked himself. “For fear of the servant who ties my shoe? For dread of the father who has thrown himself upon my protection? No, by the Lord I am not yet so base!”

He left the door, and as he approached the girl pity and compassion came into his heart and sanctified his love.

“My dear,” he said, coming to Peggy's

side, "I have done most ill to lead you to deceive your father, and to bring you here. God forgive me for the harm I may have done."

"You have done me no hurt," she said eagerly, "'twas I who——" she stopped short and buried her face in her hands. Presently there rose a little sob, and a tear trickled down her cheek.

Blase was powerless to comfort her. He dared not check her salutary grief. He was too guilty to reprove, too honest to condone, too wretched in seeing those tears to comfort her. His tenderest feelings were aroused; yet he dared not trust himself to touch even her forehead with his lips.

Impatient with himself he rose, and, taking the candle, went out into the gallery. "Who knows," thought he, "but that my servant may be waiting to call me to account." The passage was empty and

silent. He returned. The girl had risen from her seat, and stood white and terrified in the middle of the room.

“Come,” he said. “No one is in the corridor. I will take you downstairs and there you will be safe.”

He held out his hand; she took it without a word, and he led her towards the door, as though she were a little child. He heard her teeth chattering with the cold of reactionary emotion; the clinging coldness of her fingers was deathlike. Near the door she stopped, and spoke in a trembling whisper:

“You intend to part from me, and never to look at me again,” she said.

Blase could not deny it, for the intention was in his mind; he bowed his head.

“It is so—it is so,” said she; “you cannot tell a falsehood. Wait. You shall not go down with me. I came in the dark. I can go in the dark. If you tell me to go,

I will go. I will be quite good—quite obedient.” She looked out into the dark passage despairingly as if it were perpetual night she was about to enter, and then the trembling fit seized her again so that she had to cling to the door for support. She looked up into his face with the most piteous yearning in her eyes, and she said :

“ You will say good-bye to me, now.”

Blase hesitated for a moment, and then he took the poor shivering soul into his arms and pressed her to his breast.

“ Oh, if you could love me but a little,” she murmured, clinging to him and kissing his coat between her words.

“ Poor child, I love you but too much !” thought Blase, but he did not speak.

“ Good-bye,” she said.

“ Good-bye,” he answered.

He would have kissed her forehead, but she stood on tip-toe and sought his lips with hers.

She lay for a moment with her head upon his breast, then she slowly detached her quivering fingers from his neck, and fell to wailing in a subdued manner as though struggling to overcome her feeling.

“You cannot go in this condition,” said Blase. “You will fall. Poor soul you are ill !” He still supported her for it was clear she was incapable of standing alone. “Sit here,” he said, and placed her in a chair. He fetched a cushion from the sofa ; then he wrapped his riding coat about her shivering little body and limbs. “Rest here until you are composed and strong again,” he said. She smiled with ineffable tenderness as he did these kindly offices, and then, worn out with passion and grief, she turned her cheek upon the cushion and closed her eyes. It was happiness to be there.

Blase, looking down at her pale pretty face, would have given ten years of his life to have knelt by her side and laid his head

beside hers. It was as sore a temptation as a man with passionate blood and a tender heart could be put to. But he overcame it manfully, only he dared not trust himself to maintain the struggle, and leaving her there half asleep he lit a second taper, passed her noiselessly, and left the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH BLASE MAKES HIS ESCAPE.

BLASE passed the night in Captain Davenant's closet. About midnight he crept softly upstairs to his room; the girl had fallen asleep, and had not moved. Again about five he went to the room: she was gone.

“It is all over,” sighed Blase; “the song is sung, and nothing is left but the memory of sweetness and tears.” And an aching heart was the only reward he could find then for his virtue.

He could not stay in the room. Every object that met his eyes made him wretched. He returned to the little room

below, where he had lit the reading lamp. A dozen books were on the table, all tried and found wanting in sustaining interest; he got down a dozen more.

It was a strange sight that met the eyes of Captain Davenant when he opened the door at eight o'clock—the room littered with books, a lamp burning the daylight, and Blase haggard and yellow standing with the sword in his hand, which had so excited his boyish fancy long ago.

“Good God, Blase, my boy! what is the matter?”

Blase dropped the sword, which he had but the moment before unsheathed, back in its scabbard, laughing.

“Nothing alarming, sir.” He shook his grandfather’s hand. “I could not sleep, so I came down and read. And the result of my reading is that the old spirit is revived in me. I—in a word, sir, I would be a soldier.”

His hand was still in his grandfather's. The old gentleman pressed it warmly.

“The wish of my heart is fulfilled,” he said, and drawing himself up he looked proudly at his grandson and shook his hand again. “I congratulate you, sir, on your choice. ’Tis a profession which, at this moment when our shores are menaced by the invader, every able man should take up, and I know of none other so suitable to a man of your rank. Again let me tell you, I am glad of this determination. I saw the martial spirit in you when you were a little lad, and it gave me pride then and since to think that you would one day wear the sword that was struck from my hand too early. ’Twas my hope when you spoke the other day of choosing a career that you would choose this, and the reason I did not speak the wish in my mind, was that I desired you to have all the glory of making a noble choice, and to

make this step from an innate sentiment of duty to yourself, to your king, and to your country. Come, let us sit down and talk upon this matter."

They seated themselves, the old captain with a look full of admiration for his grandson, Blase with a long face, feeling himself a kind of impostor and undeserving of such high approval. Duty to himself might have helped him to his decision, but his king and country had not entered into his consideration. His main object was to cut his way out of the net in which he had got entangled. It is true that, as he said, the old thirst for martial glory had seized him in looking through the books which had stirred his young spirits ; but it was not until he read that a pair of colours could be bought for four hundred pounds, and reflected that Aunt Gertrude's gift might justly be used in such a purchase, that he resolved to become a soldier.

Captain Davenant entered into the subject with enthusiasm, and to the pile of books already upon the table, added a dozen more volumes to explain the means by which Blase was to obtain an ensigncy. Aunt Gertrude's astonishment was great when, coming to see what detained the gentlemen from their breakfast, she found them side by side, poring over a book, with the lamp still burning.

"My dear," said the captain, rising, "you will excuse us for forgetting you when you learn the cause of our neglect. Blase has chosen the soldier's path to glory."

Aunt Gertrude listened and grew deadly pale, yielding to the instincts of her sex; then mastering her weakness, she walked with a fairly firm step to Blase, and kissing him said :

"I'm proud to hear this, dear." She couldn't say she was glad. "When must you leave us?" she asked.

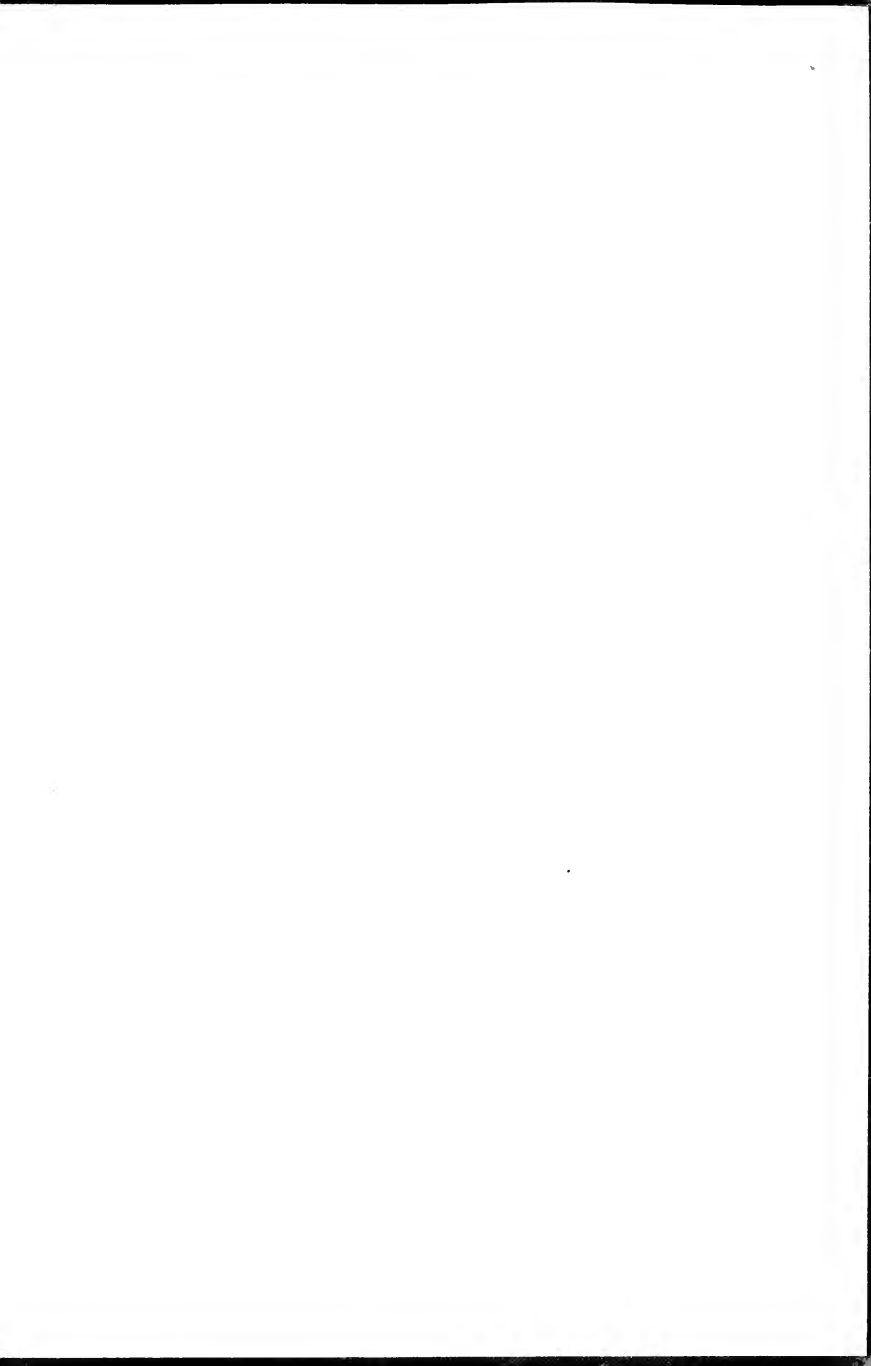
“To-day.”

“So soon?”

“To-day, dear.”

And in effect, at eleven o'clock that morning Blase left Redwater. But of those who watched his departure, only the broken-hearted little maid looking through her tears from an upper window of the old house, knew truly why he had left Redwater so hastily.

END OF VOL. I.



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